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Weird Tales

OCTOBER, 1935

WEIRD TALES

Vol. 26, No. 4

THE SIX SLEEPERS

a startling thrill-tale

by EDMOND HAMILTON

Seabury Quinn

John Flanders

Arlton Eadie

Paul Ernst

DOCTOR SATAN

strikes a ghastly blow in

"HOLLYWOOD HORROR"

a tale of stark terror

"PSYCHIANA"

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"If he didn't escape, he too would lie here in death-like sleep."

The Six Sleepers

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A fascinating story about six fighting-men, each from a different century, who slept through the ages, to awaken at last amid the ruins of a super-civilization of the future

GARRY WINTON ran down that gloomy, narrow defile of the Atlas Mountains with bullets whining past his head and the yells of blood-lusting fanatics in his ears. His gun was empty and he sought desperately with his eyes for some place of refuge as he ran.

The frowning black cliffs on either side of him, sheer, vertical battlements of black basalt, offered no visible shelter. Then he glimpsed a round dark hole in the rock wall just ahead, and with his last strength he ran to it and stumbled into the darkness inside it.

Crouched there, panting, the young American prospector waited tensely for his pursuers. His lean, wiry figure was taut; his blond, tanned face and serious gray eyes were distorted into a mirthless grin as he saw the yelling, white-burnoosed Berbers come running down the defile.

They were making straight for the cavity in which he was. Clubbing his rifle, Garry Winton awaited the final, useless fight. He saw their brown faces and glittering eyes as they came on—and then to his amazement they abruptly halted, and recoiled!

In utter fear, the Berbers stared at the cavity where he crouched, their faces suddenly terror-stricken, their voices a shrill, fearful babble. Quickly they scrambled back from the cave, and then in a panic-stricken mob ran back down the defile.

Garry Winton looked out, stupefied, and saw that already his former pursuers had disappeared from sight.

"Now that," he said to himself, "is a damned queer thing to happen!"

He turned and looked back into the dark cavity in which he had been crouching.

"It's a cinch they weren't suddenly afraid of me," he told himself. "It must be something about this place that scared them."

He took from his pocket a little flashlight and sent its bright beam quivering back into the darkness of the cavity.

Garry discovered that this was not just a shallow hole in the rock, but was the mouth of a natural rock tunnel that slanted back upward into the mass of the cliff. His curiosity at once aroused, he re-entered the opening and started to ascend the dark tunnel.

● Since his discovery by Weird Tales nine years ago, Edmond Hamilton has become a leading contributor to many periodicals, and short-stories, novelettes and novels have flowed in a steady stream from his prolific typewriter. He is acknowledged master of both weird stories and science fiction. His very best stories in both these fields, the cream of this fascinating author's work, appear only in Weird Tales. We recommend to you this story of the distant future, "The Six Sleepers," for we know that you will find it very enjoyable.

Up through the gloomy rock passage he climbed, his feet splashing in a trickle of water that flowed down it and had eroded it into being in long-dead ages. Finally Garry emerged into a great rock cavern that lay far up inside the cliff from the entrance.

Black, somber walls of basalt rose all around him into the darkness toward the vaulted roof of rock high above. This deep-buried cavern was filled with a deathly, solemn stillness, broken only by the subdued chuckling of a little spring a few yards from him.

Garry went over to the spring. Bubbles of gas came up constantly through the chuckling water, he saw. He scented an acrid, alien and pungent odor from the gas, one that somehow made his senses dulled and heavy. It was like the drugging breath of gardens of opiate flowers, lulling him into strange sleepiness.

He now became aware that the whole cavern was filled with this unfamiliar soporific gas, which, being lighter than

air, ascended through the spring from somewhere far in earth's interior and was trapped here in the cave. Garry was feeling drowsier every moment.

"Better get out of here!" he told himself, turning from the spring to the entrance of the tunnel.

Suddenly he stopped, frozen rigid. "What the devil!"

His flashlight beam had fallen on a figure lying on the floor near the spring, the shape of a man's body.

GARRY cautiously approached the prone shape. As he flashed his light over it, he uttered a cry of amazement. This man was dressed like a legionary of ancient Rome, in bronze helmet and cuirass, his shortsword in its belt. He lay with eyes closed in his swarthy face, his body apparently perfectly preserved.

And now Garry saw beyond him another and bigger man lying in the dark, one who wore a cap-like iron helmet and chain-armor, with the red cross of the Crusaders blazoned on his breast.

"Have I gone crazy or am I really seeing this?" gasped Garry.

He flashed his light beyond the Roman and the Crusader. There were three other men lying in the cavern.

Garry saw that one of them looked like an Italian condottiere or soldier of the Fifteenth Century, his attire a heavy salade helmet and an iron breastplate over a showy crimson silk doublet.

Another appeared to be a Sixteenth Century buccaneer, wearing a brilliant kerchief tied around his head, stained, baggy clothes and sea boots, with two cutlasses and a brace of pistols in his belt.

The last was a slim young man who wore the blue satin coat and breeches and silk stockings and court rapier, all considerably battered and worn, of an Eighteenth Century French nobleman.

Garry looked unbelievingly at the five men—Roman legionary, Crusader, Italian bravo, buccaneer, and French nobleman.

Here were five men from five different periods of the world's past, who, each in his own time, had ventured into this cavern. What had killed them, and what miracle had preserved their bodies?

"They don't even look dead," Garry whispered in dazed awe. "They look as though they were sleeping."

He knelt slowly and touched the Roman's face. "By heaven, they *are* only sleeping!" he cried; for the swarthy face of the Roman soldier was faintly warm.

He stared at them, his bewilderment a thousandfold increased, racking his drowsing mind for the explanation. What was it that had held these five men of five ages in strange, deathless sleep here through the centuries? He could not conceive of any explanation—his brain seemed too dull and sleepy even to attack the weird mystery. Then abruptly that very sleepiness and languor he was feeling gave him the solution.

The soporific gas from the spring! That gas, which was making him feel so sleepy and heavy, was what had trapped each of these five men in the past when they entered the cavern. That unfamiliar gas, welling up from far inside earth's interior, must have power to hold living things in suspended animation indefinitely.

Each of these five men had been overcome by the gas and had sunk into a sleep from which they had never awakened, since the gas had never ceased to well up into and fill the cavern. No wonder the tribesmen outside had been in such fear of this weird cave!

Garry suddenly realized that he too was in danger of meeting that fate. He had become almost too drowsy and weak to stand. In sudden panic he started toward the tunnel entrance, but at his

first movement his numbed, nerveless body sprawled to the floor.

He struggled to get up, to reach the tunnel. If he didn't escape, he too would lie here in death-like sleep for all time like these five. He mustn't fall asleep—he mustn't! With fading consciousness he fought to remain awake, to crawl to the tunnel. But his lead-like limbs would no longer obey his will. The final remnants of consciousness were being stripped from him by the soothing, soporific effect of the gas he breathed. A warm tide of utter, pleasant drowsiness swept him helplessly on its breast into a world of darkness in which he knew nothing more.

GARRY WINTON awoke to a sensation of warmth upon his face and to consciousness of a diminishing quivering of the surface on which he lay. It was some time before he opened his eyes, and when he did so, he was almost blinded by bright sunlight. Blinking, he gazed dazedly.

He was in the cavern of the five sleepers in which he had fallen asleep. But now there was a great yawning hole in its roof that let in a flood of sunlight. This hole appeared to have been newly made, for chunks of broken rock were still dropping from its edges.

Suddenly Garry understood what had happened. There had been an earth-tremor, whose final quiverings he had felt as he awakened, and that tremor had shattered the roof of the cavern and allowed the soporific gas to escape into the outer air. And once the gas that held him in the strange sleep was gone, he had awakened.

Garry suddenly turned as from beside him came a muttered, bewildered exclamation:

"Nom de Dieu! Cette——"

It was the young French nobleman in the blue satin court suit who had spoken. He had awakened and was gazing around with amazement on his handsome, high-bred face.

His eyes met Garry's, and they stared at each other. Garry's heart was beating rapidly with excitement, for he saw now that the other four sleepers were stirring also.

He said slowly to the Frenchman, "You understand English?"

"L'Anglais? I can speak it," the other answered quickly. "But who are you? What has happened?"

His amazed eyes took in the other four waking men. "I remember now," he said. "I came into this cavern to hide for the night from hostile natives, and then fell strangely asleep here."

He added, "I am Charles, Vicomte d'Epernon, once of the court of the martyred Louis Sixteenth but now a refugee from the rabble that now rules France—a soldier of fortune."

Suddenly both Garry and d'Epernon were startled as from beside them boomed a deep voice in oddly accented English.

"Be ye Christians or be ye Saracens?"

It was the Crusader who spoke, a great, iron figure that stood looking down at them now with stern face and cold eyes.

"I am Count Richard of Launsig, follower in the crusade of the blessed Saint Louis," he boomed. "It was Saracens who drove me into this cavern—be ye such?"

Before they could answer, another voice sputtered behind the Crusader, an angry one whose distorted English vibrated with rage.

"Aye, if you are Moors you are my enemies too, for it was the accursed Moors who drove me in here also, *me,* Francesco Grappone, one-time lieutenant of the invincible Cesare Borgia."

The fiery black eyes of the Italian condottiere sparkled with anger, his hands on the hilts of his sword and dagger.

"Now listen, don't do anything hasty!" Garry exclaimed. "We're none of us Moors, and we're all of us in the same boat here."

"Boat?" roared another voice. "Split me, we're in no boat at all but in a damned hole in the ground, jawing together!"

The sun-browned, booted buccaneer pushed through the others flourishing one of his cutlasses, his small eyes red with menace.

"If you'd know who *I* am, ask 'em back at Tortuga and Caracas if they know Tom Haskins' name!" he snarled. "Ask 'em back there on the Spanish Main, where I'd be now if I hadn't run east to harry the Guinea trade and piled my ship up on this cursed country's coast."

He glared around them. "But don't think that because my ship and crew are gone, you can foul my hawser! If one of you tries it I'll split him to the chin, I'll cut him down like pork——"

"Talk not so readily of killing or you'll get your fill of it!" snapped the Italian, Grappone, drawing his sword.

"Ho, ye want fight, do ye?" cried Haskins. "Come on then, you scum!"

Grappone's blade flashed like a striking snake, but an iron-gauntleted hand smote him and the buccaneer reeling apart.

"Peace to this brawling!" boomed the Crusader. "I'll cleave the man who starts fight here without due cause."

"Well done, Count Richard!" Garry approved quickly. "I think we'll have trouble enough without fighting among ourselves."

Then Garry saw, beyond the sputtering Italian and the raging buccaneer, the sixth sleeper, who had got to his feet and was looking at them. This was the Roman soldier, a stocky man with a hard, strong face, his eyes looking out amazed yet alert from beneath his bronze helmet, his short-sword drawn and ready in his hand.

Calling up long-forgotten college Latin, Garry spoke haltingly to the legionary. The Roman's face changed as he answered.

"I am Quintus Maximus, centurion in the legions of Trajan Cæsar," he told Garry. "I was part of a punitive expedition sent here from Numidia. My comrades died from lack of water, and I found water in this cave—but had hardly found it when I fell asleep."

"We are all friends," Garry told the Roman. "We are all men who have lain sleeping here even as you have."

Then Garry faced the others. They were still looking around as though utterly at a loss to account for one another. He told them:

"Men, we are all six of us from different times of the earth's past, and we have lain sleeping here together until chance has at last permitted us to awaken. How long we have slept, it is impossible for me to guess, for I can not estimate how long it has been since I entered the cave. But when I entered here, it was anno domini 1934."

"What?" cried Count Richard. "Mean ye I have slept here for more than seven hundred years?"

"And I for more than four hundred?" exclaimed Grappone, amazed and incredulous.

"That's what has happened," Garry assured them. "And maybe for much longer than that, since we do not know how many hundreds or even thousands of years have passed since I entered here."

WHEN he had translated to Quintus Maximus, the Roman's swarthy face expressed his bewilderment.

"But if that is so, then Trajan Cæsar no longer rules the empire of Rome?" he said.

"There is no more Roman empire—even in my day it had been long past and done with," Garry told him.

The Roman shook his head in flat unbelief. "It is impossible that Rome should have perished, no matter what else has passed."

Garry told the others, "We don't know what the world outside will be like. It may be full of enemies, for all we know; for after all we six will be strangers in it, men from the world's past! Therefore I propose that we agree to stick together and help each other in the face of all strangers, until we can discover what this world and time are like."

"Agreed!" said d'Epernon promptly, drawing his slim rapier and extending it in a level salute.

Francesco Grappone slapped his own sword against the rapier. "You have the oath of the bravest soldier in Italy!" he cried.

"And the word of a member of the Free Brotherhood, which is as good!" growled Captain Tom Haskins, clashing one of his cutlasses against their two blades.

Count Richard solemnly extended his huge, unwieldy sword. "I accept the compact," the Crusader said. "But what of yon pagan Roman? Is he to join us who are Christian men?"

"He looks like a strong fighter, and this will give us a chance to convert him," Garry said hastily.

The iron Crusader nodded, and when Garry explained to Quintus Maximus, the Roman's sword flashed out with the others.

"A Roman gives his word," he said.

Haskins drew his second cutlas and handed it to Garry. "You'll be needing this worse than I will," growled the buccaneer.

Garry struck the other five blades with the cutlas. "Then we six are agreed to fight for each other until we are sure of safety," he declared. "And now," he added as they sheathed their swords, "to get out of this cave and see how long we *have* slept."

He hurried to the tunnel entrance, the others following. But he found it blocked by a solid wall of down-fallen rock. The rock looked as though it had fallen a long time before, and it explained why no one else had entered the cavern and why their sleeping forms had never been disturbed.

There was nothing for it but to climb out the opening in the cavern roof. Yet it took more than two hours of struggling effort before they could all scramble up through the high opening.

They hauled up the great armored Crusader, last, and then stood panting on the edge of a rock ledge, staring eagerly. The sun was just sinking on the western horizon, a crimson shield whose level red rays lit up the world with dying splendor.

A WEIRD and beautiful landscape stretched before them, a mighty jungle whose vast green expanse started just below the low, rolling hills on which they stood, and swept away as far as eye could reach. Great, gray-trunked monarchs of the forest rose to heights of hundreds of feet, bearing on them a solid mass of strangely fronded foliage and brilliant flowers of unearthly beauty.

Great birds or bird-like creatures were flitting to and fro above the roof of this dense forest in the waning sunset, while down on the jungle floor the space between the huge trunks was choked with creepers and underbrush and wrapped already in forbidding darkness. There was no sign whatever of the rocky cliffs

and mountains that had formerly occupied this part of the world.

Garry stared with his five strangely assorted companions across this wild and forbidding landscape, struck with awe.

"It's been thousands of years, maybe hundreds of thousands," he muttered finally. "The world has changed, immensely."

"It's witchcraft," croaked Captain Haskins in a dry voice, the buccaneer's hand tightly gripping the hilt of his cutlas.

"Aye, this looks to me like a world of demons and not of men," came the deep voice of the Crusader, his gauntleted hand making the sign of the cross as he spoke.

D'Epernon pointed suddenly across the vast jungle toward a cluster of distant towers standing out against the red disk of the setting sun. It was so far and their vision so blinded by the crimson orb that they could see those towers only dimly. But even at that distance they seemed of cyclopean dimensions, black, huge, truncated columns towering from the remote jungle.

"That, can that be a city?" whispered the young Frenchman to Garry. "If it is —*mon Dieu,* it must be titanic!"

"It looks like a city of some kind," Garry said tautly. "Shall we head toward it and find out?"

"You are the leader," the great Crusader, Count Richard, said impassively. "We follow you there if you wish."

Garry looked in surprize around the five but found on their faces no evidence of dissent from the Crusader's acceptance of his leadership.

Roman, buccaneer, Italian and Frenchman—all five fighting-men were apparently so stupefied by their awaking in the far future that they looked instinctively for leadership to Garry, who seemed to understand the incredible situation a little better than they.

Garry said decisively, "Then I say let's make for that city. We need not actually enter it until we find out whether the people there look friendly or not, but we'll learn something about what kind of world we've waked into.

"We might as well start now," he added. "We can make several miles through that jungle before darkness comes."

In a few moments they were marching down the slope of the grassy, low hills toward the edge of the mighty forest, moving in a compact little group.

Garry and young d'Epernon led, the American's gray eyes searching watchfully along the rim of the jungle, while the young nobleman merely stared with casual interest around the strange scene. Grappone and Quintus Maximus were behind them, the Italian's black, challenging eyes darting this way and that, the Roman marching forward as coolly as though he owned the country about them. Haskins followed in a waddling stride, cursing audibly at the low thorn bushes that tore at his boots. Last came the big, clanking figure of Count Richard, wearing his iron armor as though it were weightless, his cold, somber eyes taking in everything ahead.

They moved down the slope through the thickening twilight and into the intensified darkness of the jungle. There they forged forward between huge trunks they could barely see in the dense obscurity, hacking their way with their swords through thickets of underbrush, tripping on tangled creepers.

Before they had penetrated the jungle more than a mile, Garry halted suddenly.

"Listen! It sounds like a fight over there!"

From the dark jungle to their right were coming sounds of combat, squeal-

ing cries, the thud of rushing bodies. Then through the noises of conflict came a brief husky human cry.

"By heaven, it's a man being attacked by something!" Garry exclaimed. "Shall we see what it's about?"

For answer the five drew their swords and plunged after him through the underbrush toward the sounds of battle.

THEY emerged in a few minutes into a small clearing between the huge trunks. It was dimly lit by the stars that had blossomed in the dusking heavens, and it presented an amazing scene.

Crowding scores of dark-furred animals that were like huge rats were gathered about a great hollow tree, snapping and squealing at something inside the hollow.

The rat-like beasts turned as Garry and his companions crashed into the clearing, and immediately came rushing toward the six men. Garry, his sword poised to slash at the foremost of the creatures, glimpsed the thing's face in the starlight and was so transfixed with horrified amazement he forgot to strike. For though the creature's body was like that of a huge rat, its head and face were *human!*

"Blood of Christ, they're demons—they have the faces of men!" screeched Grappone.

"They are fiends the Evil One has sent to beset us!" shouted the great voice of the Crusader.

But the rat-men, though their faces were human, were now leaping up with bared fangs longer than any human teeth, to seize and pull down the horrified men with paws like webbed hands. Their human eyes were red with hate and from them came a chorus of squealing cries.

Garry recovered himself enough to cry to the others, "They're monsters of some kind, not demons! Quick, your swords!"

As he yelled, he struck with his own blade at the foremost of the upleaping rat-men. His cutlas sank deep into the neck where the creature's human head joined its big rat body. It fell back dead.

The other monstrous things were now upon them, but Garry's five companions had recovered enough presence of mind to see that these things could be killed. Six swords whirled and flashed amid the attacking rat-men, as they sought to pull the men down. It was a nightmare fight in the starlit clearing against the human-faced monsters.

Gazing into blazing human eyes, hearing the squealing cries from semi-human throats, Garry struck and stabbed. Beside him the huge blade of Count Richard sheared death amid the rat-men, while beyond him the buccaneer, roaring, whirled his cutlas.

In a few moments all the men were bleeding from bites of the rat-men's fangs. Then d'Epernon went down, pulled from his feet by the clutching claws of the rat-men. Instantly Quintus Maximus leaped to aid him, but the Roman too was pulled down by the squealing hordes.

Garry glimpsed the two being dragged away into the darkness by a mass of the monstrous creatures. He yelled to his three remaining comrades and their blades whirled like dancing brands of light as they fought through the unclean horde to succor their comrades. Count Richard strode ahead, the Crusader's mighty weapon hewing the bodies of the weird attackers while their fangs and claws could make no impression on his iron armor.

The remaining rat-men bolted into the jungle after their fellows who had dragged away the Roman and the Frenchman.

"After them!" yelled Garry. "They've taken d'Epernon and Quintus!"

They crashed through the brush in pursuit of the rat-men, and in a moment came upon a number of large holes in the ground, the mouths of big tunnels burrowed out of the earth.

"They've taken d'Epernon and the Roman into their tunnels!" panted Grappone. "We don't know which one, either!"

They looked helplessly at the scores of tunnel-mouths, into one of which the rat-men had vanished with their captives.

"We've got to find them!" Garry exclaimed. "We swore we'd all stick together and we can't desert d'Epernon and Quintus now."

"But how in hell's name are we to find them in a cursed maze of tunnels like this?" demanded the buccaneer.

Suddenly Garry remembered something. "The rat-men were attacking someone inside that hollow tree when we interrupted. We'll go back and see who it is."

They hastened back to the starlit clearing and advanced cautiously to the dark opening of the huge hollow tree.

GARRY called into the dark hollow, without hope of being understood but making his tone placating, "Whoever you are, you can come out without fear. We are friends."

There was a moment's silence and then a figure appeared in the opening. The men uttered their surprize.

"A wench!" exclaimed Haskins. "And a likely-looking one, too!"

For it was a girl who stood in the opening, a black-haired, browned, slim girl whose smoothly tanned body was hardly concealed by the brief skin tunic she wore. She held a short spear and looked as lithe and dangerous as a tigress, her dark eyes watchful.

Garry took a step forward. Instantly there was a snarl from behind the girl and out of the hollow back of her a large animal darted to her side. The men fell back in common astonishment and horror.

The creature that had darted out to take its stand beside the girl was a wolf-man. Its body was the great, hairy body of a wolf but its head and face were those of a man. Its green eyes were flaming and as it snarled defiance it bared cruel canine and incisor teeth.

"God's name!" exclaimed Grappone. "First rat-men and now a wolf-man. It is a world of monsters!"

"The woman must be a witch, and the thing beside her her familiar," said Count Richard flatly. "They must be slain."

He strode forward, raising his huge sword, but Garry caught his arm. "Wait! There's nothing supernatural about these two, and they may be able to tell us where the rat-men took Quintus and d'Epernon."

The Crusader protested, "But that man-animal is surely a demon who——"

"No demon, no," Garry said. "Tens of thousands of years may have passed while we slept, and in that time the world has no doubt somehow spawned these strange half-human races.

"Stand back, the rest of you," he told them, "and I'll see if I can make the girl understand me."

He took a step forward and the girl raised her spear a little higher, her eyes holding his with deadly intensity. The wolf-man snarled deep in his throat and surged forward to spring, but the girl caught his hairy neck behind his human head and held him back.

Garry sheathed his sword and held up his hands in a friendly gesture, though cold chills were running down his back.

"We are friends," he repeated, hoping that his tone would lessen the girl's evident distrust.

To his amazement she answered him,

and he could understand her. She spoke, not English, but a language derived from English as Spanish is derived from Latin.

"Friends?" she said. "Then why does your comrade who wears iron wish to kill Hath?"

Garry said, "If Hath's that creature beside you, it's because neither my comrades nor I have ever seen a thing like him before, and so we are amazed and fearful."

Her eyes widened in incredulity. "Never seen a wolf-man before? Does your tribe then keep none of them?"

"We're not from any of your tribes," Garry explained. "We are men from the far past who have been sleeping and who have just awakened into this world, where all is strange and new to us."

The girl's simple, direct mind accepted the incredible explanation which a more sophisticated intelligence would have doubted. Her clear dark eyes smiled suddenly into Garry's and she lowered her spear.

"I believe you," she told him. "I am Lenya of the tribe of Thimor, whose home is in the hills many miles south of here."

To Garry's amazement the wolf-man now spoke to the girl, in a husky, strange, yet human-sounding voice.

"Be not too hasty, mistress!" the creature warned. "Strangers are always enemies."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Garry, staring at the creature. "He can talk!"

"Of course Hath can talk," Lenya rejoined, surprized at his amazement.

To the wolf-man she said, "These strangers are not enemies, Hath. Did they not save us from the rat-men?"

Garry told her, "We did, but those rat-monsters captured two of our number and got away with them through underground runways. Can you tell me where they might have taken them?"

"I can tell you," Lenya said, a little sadly. "They have taken them where they have taken so many captives in the past, to the great underground community of the rat-men beneath the city Khmur."

"The city Khmur?" Garry repeated. "Do you mean that city of huge towers that lies miles west of here?"

She nodded. "That is Khmur, once one of the mightiest cities of the Masters, the race that ruled all earth, but now dead and forsaken by all save the swarming rat-men who lair beneath it."

"The girl speaks riddles," complained Grappone. "Who is this race she talks of, and whence came all these monsters?"

"You do not know of the Masters?" said Lenya. "Then you must come from a time even farther back in the past than theirs.

"The Masters were a great race of humans who developed from the men before them. They possessed all powers and discovered all secrets and ruled all of the earth, their race forming but one nation. They erected mighty cities such as Khmur, which lies near here, and Anthar, and L'Long, and many others. They had power to rend mountains apart and destroy them, by releasing fires like lightnings. They flew in the air with wings attached to their bodies, and legend says they flew even to other worlds in the sky beyond sun and moon.

"The Masters were lords of life, too, and could mold the forms of life as they pleased. And so they bred their human servants into unhuman and different forms, according to the purpose for which they designed them. Some of them they bred into rat-men to work their mines and burrow beneath the earth for them, men whose bodies were made rat-like for that purpose but who retained their human heads and minds. Others they bred into fish-men who searched for

them the bottoms of the deepest seas. Still others they bred into wolf-men such as Hath, to be their human hounds of chase in their favorite sport of hunting. And many other such hybrids they bred.

"But after long millenniums there rose dissensions between the Masters, and war came between their cities, and they smote one another with such terrific weapons that in a short time almost all of them were destroyed, save a few who had fled the cities to the hills.

"Those few surviving Masters were ancestors of the hardy tribes of hillmen to which I belong. Long ago our race lost the last of the knowledge and power our great ancestors possessed, but still we are their descendants, and the only true humans on earth.

"But the hybrid servants of the Masters, when the Masters were gone, survived and increased in numbers. And now in the world there are far more of the hordes of rat-men and bird-men and fish-men and the like than there are of us, the true men. And all of them are our enemies save the wolf-men, who still faithfully serve us.

"The rat-men have captured many of our number in the past. And two days ago when my brother Imos went hunting and then did not return, I feared that he too had been captured and I slipped away from my tribe with my faithful Hath to seek my brother in the jungle.

"But we did not find him and so we knew he must have been captured by the rat-men and taken to their lairs beneath Khmur. And before we could seek further, we too were attacked by rat-men and would have been captured also had it not been for your coming."

"But what do the rat-men do with the captives they take to their lairs?" Garry asked as Lenya finished.

Her eyes widened with horror. "They sacrifice their captives once each month to That Which Dies Not. Once each month we hear their drummings from underneath distant Khmur, and know they are making their sacrifice."

THE great Crusader stirred and said to Garry, "Ask her what it is, this thing she calls That Which Dies Not."

Garry put the question, but Lenya shook her head. "I know no more than you, for those who see That Which Dies Not never live to tell of it. But we all know that it is someone or something horrible that the rat-men worship and sacrifice to, as they will sacrifice my brother and your two comrades."

"They'll not sacrifice Quintus and d'Epernon, not while the rest of us are living," Garry told her with steely emphasis. "Nor your brother either, if we can prevent it."

"How can you hope to prevent it?" Lenya said. "Already your two friends have been taken through the tunnels that run far under the jungle, to the lairs beneath Khmur."

"Then to Khmur we'll go, and get them," Garry said decisively.

"'Aye, we swore a compact and we must succor our captured comrades," said Count Richard. "Also, much would I like to confront that false idol of worship, whatever it is, which is called That Which Dies Not."

"And maybe while we're after d'Epernon and the Roman, we can pick up a little loot in that city!" said Haskins the buccaneer, his small eyes glistening. "Gold, maybe, or gems——"

Lenya shook her head. "You are all mad, for if you dare venture into the labyrinthine burrows and tunnels of the rat-men which lie beneath Khmur, you will never return. But it is a brave madness, and Hath and I will go with you to search also for my brother Imos."

"You will?" Garry exclaimed. "If

you'll just guide us through these jungles to Khmur, it'll be all we ask, and you can wait outside the city while we venture in for our friends and Imos."

"It is agreed!" cried Lenya, her dark eyes alight. "Hath can guide us through the night and jungle straight to the city."

The wolf-man spoke in his husky voice, raising anxious eyes to the girl. "I can guide the way to Khmur, mistress, but it will be guiding you into deadly danger you should not venture near."

"If these men from the past are not afraid to venture for their friends, I am not afraid to venture for Imos!" declared the girl. "Let us start at once."

Reluctantly the wolf-man lowered his pleading gaze, and stood in the starlight sniffing the air this way and that, a weird and grotesque figure. Then he started at a trot across the clearing and into the depths of the stygian jungle. Lenya followed close behind him, and after her in single file marched Garry and Grappone and the buccaneer and the great Crusader.

As they passed the scene of their late fight with the rat-men, Garry stooped and picked up from amid the bodies the stubby shortsword of the Roman and d'Epernon's slim rapier.

The moon was now rising over the mighty jungle, casting oblique shafts of silvery light down through chinks in the roof of foliage high above. All around them in the dense vegetation rose the sounds of small animals stirring, and once or twice from far away through the night came a terrific squalling scream.

GARRY WINTON, marching with his three comrades after the girl and the weird wolf-man through the moonlit jungle, could not but wonder at the sureness of instinct of their semi-human guide. Hath seemed without effort to choose the easiest path through the masses of brush and creeepers, yet held always to one general direction.

Now and then the face of Lenya flashed around in the shafts of moonlight to assure herself that Garry and the others were close behind. The girl's slim figure moved untiringly forward after the human-headed animal who led.

Garry heard Grappone's voice behind him. "By Saint Mark, this makes me think of the night we valorous soldiers of the illustrious Don Cesare marched on Sinigaglia," the Italian was saying. "Tramped all night in the moonlight, and then at dawn we stormed the town."

"Yes, and it reminds me of when we of the Brotherhood followed Harry Morgan to sack Panama," said Haskins. "No food and no rum, and mosquitoes and fever all the way, so that to forget our troubles we trudged along through the jungle singing 'Spanish Ladies'."

The buccaneer's voice rose in raucous song:

"Farewell and adieu to you, fine Spanish ladies,
Farewell and adieu to you, ladies of Spain,
Our captain's commanded——"

"For God's sake stop that racket!" Garry ordered in a tense undertone. "Do you want to let everything within miles know we're here?"

"Aye, we go now on no godless search for loot," came the stern whisper of Count Richard. "Peace to this ribaldry."

The wolf-man and Lenya had stopped, and Garry and his comrades halted behind them. For a time they stood in the broken moonlight beside a huge tree-trunk, while Hath sniffed the air and listened.

The wolf-man whispered something to Lenya, and the girl listened and nodded. In a moment both of them turned back toward the waiting men, and Hath spoke directly to Garry in his strange, husky voice.

"We shall soon reach Khmur," the

wolf-man told him, "and your companions must make no more noise or the rat-men will be warned and will be waiting for us. It means all our lives."

Garry nodded. "They'll be silent now —I'll answer for them," he said.

Hath resumed leading them through the jungle, but now he moved with even greater caution and silence than before. They followed the wolf-man, keyed up by the knowledge that they were nearing the mysterious dead city that was their goal.

A half-hour later, Hath stopped again, at the edge of a space of clear ground which lay ahead.

"Yonder lies the city," said the wolf-man, looking out with head raised.

Garry and his comrades peered, fascinated. Out there a half-mile from them and at a little lower elevation stood that great city of cyclopean, columnar structures which they had glimpsed from miles away. Bathed in the silver moon lay Khmur, city of the long-dead Masters who once had ruled the world. It was now a place of black shadows and brooding silence, its awful pylons aspiring for twice a thousand feet into the moonlight, dark and dead.

This dusty city of a mighty, vanished race reached out a solemn spell upon Garry and his companions. Gazing at it with the girl and the wolf-man, they seemed to vision it as once it had been, blazing with lights, its streets trod by a proud race and their submissive semi-human servants, its sky humming with flying craft.

Then the spell passed, and they realized that it was not Khmur the living but Khmur the dead that they gazed at.

Garry whispered to Lenya and the wolf-man, "I see no rat-men down there. Are you sure their lairs lie beneath?"

"It is sure, yes," answered Hath. "The rat-men do not go and come much on the surface, but their underground runways extend for many miles beneath the surface of the jungle."

The wolf-man added, "I ventured into Khmur once, long ago, and saw that there were entrances in the city to the lairs below, though I did not enter them then. I can lead you to one of them."

Garry turned to Lenya. "You will stay here and await us," he told her. "Here you'll be safe, and if we can rescue your brother you can be sure that we'll do it."

She pressed his hand. "Hath will help you find Imos and your friends," she said. "I will be waiting here."

Garry whispered a word to his three companions, and they slipped soundlessly out into the moonlight with Hath and started down across the clear space of ground toward the dead city.

THE Crusader's armor clanked a little as they advanced but they made no other noise. As they went forward into the shadow of the huge pylons, Garry saw wrecks of statues and walls about them in the moonlight, and guessed they were crossing ruined gardens that once had encircled the great city.

They stepped onto marble-paved streets, still smooth and unbroken after ages of disuse. American and buccaneer, Crusader and Italian, they strode after the wolf-man past the bases of titan structures that towered above them like vertical mountains.

There was no sign or sound of the rat-men in the dead streets and buildings. But suddenly Hath stopped short.

The wolf-man listened, then abruptly motioned them with him into the black interior of one of the mighty buildings. Crouching there with them in the blackness, he whispered, "We are followed!"

"The rat-men?" Garry asked in a low voice, but Hath motioned him to silence.

There was a scraping sound in the dark as Count Richard drew his great sword. Garry and Grappone and Haskins already had their blades out, tensing behind the wolf-man.

They heard soft steps out on the moonlit streets, then saw a figure appear in the silvery light out there, at sight of whom Garry uttered a brief exclamation.

"It's Lenya!"

The girl, hearing his utterance, turned quickly and came in to join them in the blackness.

"I knew you would not let me come with you," she said quickly, "so I waited till you had started and then followed. I could not wait out there."

"Mistress, you should not have come!" uttered the anxious whisper of the wolf-man.

"Hath is right," Garry agreed; "but now that you're here, we can hardly send you back."

Grappone was plucking his arm tautly in the dark. "Saints in heaven!" whispered the condottiere. "This place we have come into!"

He and the Crusader and Haskins were staring about them in awe, the eyes of all the men now having become accustomed to the comparative darkness inside the huge building. Garry, looking about, saw that their little group was standing just inside the entrance of a colossal hall whose dusky walls rose vastly about them, only half visible in the obscurity. The American made out looming shapes of glinting metal, mighty things that might have been machines and that were ranked in symmetrical rows down the middle of the chamber.

Moved by overpowering curiosity, Garry approached the nearest of these things and examined it, straining his eyes in the dark. He found it an upright metal cone mounted in a gimbal-like framework, slender pipes or cables running from the tip of the cone to other similar machines farther along the hall.

Examining the thing, Garry whispered excitedly, "It's a mechanism for production of some kind of power, you can see from the lead-off. This building must have been a district power-plant for part of the city."

He added, "By heaven, I believe the thing produced atomic power! For there's no intake at all and——"

The others had been listening uncomprehendingly but whirled around as there came a sudden sharp warning whisper from Hath.

"Listen!" exclaimed the wolf-man. "I wish to hear——"

Garry and the rest were silent as Hath laid his ear to the marble floor. In a moment he raised his head and motioned for them to follow his example. His ear pressed to the cold marble, Garry heard a dim, distant continuation of percussive sounds, a throbbing drumming.

He raised his head to hear a choking whisper of horror from Lenya.

"It is the drumming!" the girl exclaimed. "The drumming which the rat-men below make once each month when they sacrifice to That Which Dies Not!"

Garry's heart went cold. "You mean that our two friends—*now*——"

She nodded swiftly. "The drumming will grow louder and louder, and when it suddenly stops, as it always does, we know that the rat-men have given their captives to their god."

Garry leaped to his feet. "Then there's no time to lose! Quick, Hath—lead us to the lairs below."

"But we cannot hope to snatch the captives from the very grasp of That Which Dies Not!" exclaimed the wolf-man.

"We can try," answered Garry inflexibly. "Lead the way."

"Aye, lead the way," vibrated the Crusader's deep voice. "I am anxious to

look on the false god worshipped by those demons of hell."

The buried drumming beneath was growing audibly louder as they hastily followed Hath out into the moonlit street.

THE wolf-man led them to a corner of the colossal building, and paused. There yawned a break in the marble paving, a black hole a dozen feet across that was the mouth of a steeply inclined tunnel slanting down into the earth beneath the city. Up through the tunnel beat louder, louder, the rhythmic throbbing of the drums.

"This way leads down into the tunnels and lairs of the rat-men," Hath said.

Garry turned to the girl. "You will await us here, Lenya," he said. "And this time you will not follow."

"But I cannot——" she started.

He interrupted her abruptly. "You will obey! And if we have not returned by the time the drumming stops, escape from here at once without waiting for us longer."

"I—I will wait," she said, her face white in the moonlight.

The wolf-man came to her side and raised his head to her like an anxious domestic animal.

"Mistress, do not wait too long for us," he said, and then turned and entered the tunnel.

Garry and his three comrades followed, swords in hand, and in a moment were out of the moonlight and swallowed up by the comparative darkness of the tunnel.

They soon discovered as they advanced downward, however, that the darkness was not absolute in the passage. Streaks of glowing earth which Garry guessed to be veins of radio-active minerals existed in the tunnel's walls, and dimly illuminated it.

Hath moved with haste now, but in extreme tension. Garry saw that the hair was bristling on the wolf-man's back as they went deeper beneath the surface. Now the drums were a throbbing thunder echoing up the buried passages.

They crossed other tunnels, came to forks in the ways, were going deeper into a veritable maze of passages and burrows.

Hath turned toward them a face taut in the feeble light.

"We have not yet met a single rat-man," he said. "It is because all of them to the last one are gathered somewhere below in the place where they prepare to worship That Which Dies Not."

As they went on, Haskins growled behind Garry, "Curse me if I like this grubbing under the earth. Give me blue sea and sky to fight in, not a rabbit-hole like this."

Grappone whispered tauntingly to the buccaneer, "So you begin to grow fearful? That will make a good story to tell d'Epernon and Quintus when we find them."

"Me fearful?" raged Haskins. "Damn you for a lying rogue, when we get out of here I'll show you how——"

"Truce to this bickering," came the menacing whisper of Count Richard, behind them. "Get onward!"

They went deeper still, and now passed great chambers burrowed from the earth, in some of which they saw strange, numberless nests, the carcasses of slain animals half eaten, and other objects.

Pounding, pulsating, reverberating, the drumming was now a roar of sound that beat tangibly about them, coming from close ahead.

They rounded a turn in the tunnel, and then the wolf-man jerked backward quickly.

"The place of sacrifice lies ahead!" he warned. "Take care not to show yourselves."

Hath, with the words, dropped to his belly and began crawling forward again, his green eyes now blazing with excitement.

The four men followed his example, creeping forward around the turn of the tunnel, then pausing with the wolf-man to peer into the space which lay ahead.

It was a huge burrow or chamber in the earth, enormously greater than any other of the rat-men's burrows they had encountered. Feebly lit by the veins of radio-active matter in its earthen walls, it presented to the staring eyes of the five an amazing sight. The place was a great subterranean amphitheater, its earthen sides cut into terraces or seats which sloped down from all sides toward a round earthen pit at the bottom. The four men and the wolf-man looked down from the very top of the amphitheater.

THE terraced rows beneath them were crowded with thousands of the grotesque rat-men. Furred, webbed-pawed beasts with human heads and brutish human faces, they crammed the place with their hordes, all gazing and straining eagerly down toward the central pit.

Garry's senses sickened at sight of that unclean, monstrous throng. Creatures who were but part human yet whose ancestors long ago had been men! Creatures more terrible in their brutishness than the brutes themselves!

Garry felt someone touch his arm and turned unsteadily to find Grappone pointing down, his black eyes sparkling.

"Look, d'Epernon and Quintus!" the Italian said. "Down there in the pit!"

Garry conquered his sick horror and stared down to the earthen pit at the bottom of the amphitheater. Except for a round hole several feet across in one side, there was no entrance or exit to the pit. Prisoned in it stood three men, d'Epernon and the Roman and a dark-haired young man in a skin tunic.

"The other is Imos, the brother of Lenya!" came the wolf-man's tense voice. "And it must be that That Which Dies Not will come out for them from that hole in the side of the pit."

Garry's brain began to work. He told the others over the throbbing thunder of the drums, "We will wait here until That Which Dies Not, whatever it is, comes out into the pit. Then if we spring down into the pit quickly, we can reach it before the rat-men can stop us."

"But we'll never be able to fight our way back up through them to this tunnel again!" exclaimed Grappone.

"We won't try to," Garry told him. "I have a plan, and if it works we'll have a chance to escape; if not, we'll give these things something to remember before they get us."

By this time he almost had to shout to the others, so thunderous was the drumming. The sounds were produced by a score of rat-men above the edge of the pit beating with their paws on hollow earthen drums. Garry sensed an avid, unholy expectancy in the waiting throngs of rat-men, a straining toward the pit, an intensely eager anticipation that yet had something in it of fear.

Louder, louder—his ears seemed bursting with the appalling throbbing. And then suddenly, dramatically, the drumming ceased utterly and was succeeded by a complete and aching silence.

Garry and his comrades saw the rat-men hordes strained forward as though frozen in fixed suspense, every eye watching the pit below and the three men in the pit, and the round wall-opening.

Down there in the pit, young d'Epernon lounged against the earthen wall looking coolly toward the round opening. Quintus Maximus stood beside him, the Roman's face hard and contemptuous.

Lenya's brother was bravely erect, but horror was in his eyes.

In the strained silence there sounded the rustle of something moving beyond that opening down in the pit-wall. Then slowly, smoothly, something started to emerge from that opening into the pit.

That Which Dies Not was coming forth to claim his sacrifices.

"My God!" choked a horror-dazed, staring Garry. "That thing——"

"The false god of the brutes, spawn of the Evil One!" rasped the Crusader, his eyes cold flames.

For That Which Dies Not was a snake-man. An enormous, pale-green serpent whose thick, round body was sliding forth yard by yard from the opening into the pit, and whose head was not wholly reptilian, nor wholly human. The huge serpent jaws that were yawning wide as the thing advanced were not human, but the features above them, the rudimentary nose and the flattened ears and the pale, glassy eyes—these were the features of a *man*.

Garry, shuddering and shaken, divined sickly that this, too, was another of the monstrous semi-human hybrids which the Masters had bred into the world. It had been perhaps the only one of its kind, a mere experiment, but when the Masters had perished, it had lived on and on as great serpents can do. The awful, undying god of the rat-men, receiving here the sacrifices which they brought!

Garry wrenched himself out of his daze of horror as the monstrous thing writhed forward toward the three captives in the pit. He clutched his sword and told his three comrades and the wolf-man in a fierce, quivering whisper, "Now! Into the pit!"

They rose erect, unnoticed by the hordes of rat-men below, whose every faculty was focused on their appalling deity. Swords raised, and the wolf-man's lips writhed back from his fangs, they charged down through the rat-like hordes toward the pit.

THEIR compact group crashed down through the rat-men before the unclean horde was aware of their presence. Swords gleaming, they leaped down into the earth pit.

That Which Dies Not recoiled in anger and alarm, whipping its enormous body up into great green coils, its horrid half-human head swaying with pale eyes alight with hooded fires. It darted its head forward in a striking movement of incredible speed, its jaws yawning. But the Crusader, his face aflame beneath his iron helmet, was swinging his huge sword in a terrific arc.

"Perish before your worshippers, false idol from hell!" thundered Count Richard as he struck.

The great blade shore away the horrid head cleanly, and instantly a spout of green blood spattered the men and they were flung this way and that as the enormous coils of the body convulsed madly.

"D'Epernon! Quintus! To the hole in the wall!" screamed Garry to the frozen men.

He was dragging them, and the horror-stricken Imos, toward the round hole in the pit's side from which That Which Dies Not had emerged. They struggled past the wildly looping coils of the thing's body and crowded through the opening, into a big, dark, ill-smelling earth chamber that had been the lair of the snake-man.

"Quick!" cried Garry to the others. "Hunt for a way out of here, before the rat-men recover and follow. There must be some other entrance to this lair!"

Grappone, fumbling the earthen walls in the dark, exclaimed, "There's an opening here—high up in the wall!"

They swarmed to his side, and quick-

ly as a cat Haskins clambered up to the opening, then helped drag the others up.

The opening was apparently one by which the rat-men had lowered extra food into the lair of their god. The seven men and the wolf-man found themselves in one of the feebly-lit tunnels. As they threw themselves along this, they heard a rising tumult of squealing cries from the amphitheater.

"The rat-men have recovered from their stupefaction and they'll be after us!" Garry cried. "For God's sake, hurry!"

"Follow me!" came Hath's husky cry. "I can lead the shortest way to the surface."

As they ran up the ascending tunnels, d'Epernon panted to Garry, "I will say this for this world: one is not bored. No!"

The youth Imos was exclaiming dazedly, "That is Hath, my sister's wolf-man. Then Lenya——"

"Lenya's waiting for us above, if we ever get there!" Garry answered. "Hurry!"

They plainly heard the squealing uproar of enraged pursuit as the rat-men surged up the tunnels in search of them.

The Crusader, laboring upward in his heavy armor, fell behind the others. "You go on," he gasped. "I cannot keep up——"

"No, we'll get out together or stay together!" Garry cried. "Take his other arm, Grappone."

With Garry helping on one side and the Italian on the other, they dragged Count Richard's great figure up with them.

As they climbed, Garry took from his belt the swords of the Roman and the Frenchman he had been carrying, and handed them to them. Hardly had he done so when they saw above them a circle of silver light. They burst up into the bright moonlight that still illumined the somber city Khmur, at the same point where they had entered the tunnels.

A swift, lithe figure ran toward them in the moonlight. It was the girl Lenya, her hands clutching excitedly at her brother, words tumbling from her lips.

"Out of the city at once!" Garry shouted. "Once in the jungles, we'll have a chance."

As if in mocking answer to his words, d'Epernon pointed and cried, "See—they come!"

A mob of rat-men that had emerged at another point in the city was sweeping down the moonlit street of dead Khmur toward the fugitives. The eyes of the semi-human brutes burned red in the moonlight and from them chorused squealing, raging cries as they poured forward.

Garry desperately looked around, and saw the black entrance of the colossal building they had entered earlier that night.

"Get in here and we can stand them off better!" he cried.

THEY ran for the big doorway, thrust the girl into the dark interior of the vast place and then turned with swords glittering in the moonlight to face the oncoming horde that was but yards away.

The seven men and the wolf-man had formed themselves into a line across the door, Garry at its center with Hath on one side of him and the Crusader on the other. Imos had grasped his sister's spear.

The maddened rat-men flung themselves forward in a solid wave—and were met by six swords that drank the blood of a score of the brutes before they fell back. They rushed forward again, their numbers increased, a furry, unholy, ravening horde. Garry stabbed and slashed like a madman at the wave of distorted human faces and furry bodies. He

heard Count Richard shouting in his great voice as he swung his tremendous sword in mighty strokes. He was aware of the wolf-man Hath, all wolf now, rending with lightning fangs the necks of rat-men who came within his reach.

D'Epernon was stabbing with his rapier at the monsters as precisely and swiftly as though engaged in a fencing lesson, his handsome face unmoved in the moonlight. Beside him the Roman stood like a rock, hewing down with swift, close strokes all before him.

Grappone was using both his sword and dagger, striking, stabbing, his black eyes flashing sparks of fire.

"Ha, you wish more of it—you crave more steel, it seems," he muttered in continuous running talk as he fought. "Come and get it, then—there is plenty for all—do not crowd——"

Beyond him, at one end of the line, the buccaneer Haskins whirled his cutlas and roared over the din of battle:

"You dirty scum! You dogs! How like you *that?* And *that*——"

The youth Imos, stabbing expertly with his spear, was pulled down and rat-men swarmed over him. But Hath leaped and tore the brutes from off the youth with lightning snaps, and Imos staggered up again.

Garry, as still more of the rat-men came swarming to the attack, felt inevitable certainty.

"We'll never get away from them now!" he cried. "But we'll still kill a few!"

D'Epernon flashed a strained smile in the fight. "It is worth sleeping so long to end in a battle like this."

The line of men was giving inward, pressed back by sheer weight of the rat-men's bodies.

Garry glanced momentarily back at Lenya's white face. His gaze comprehended also the great cone-shaped machines, and a desperate thought crossed his mind.

"Try to hold them a little longer!" he told the others. "There may still be a chance for us!"

He jumped back from the line of battle in the door and raced back to the nearest of the cone-like mechanisms, the one which he had examined earlier that night. He felt about its base, found switches, push-plates, intricate beyond his comprehension. He twisted, pushed, pulled at them, hoping against hope.

If this mechanism was still intact and undamaged, as it had looked! If it were really a producer of atomic power, then time, even a great length of time, would not have deteriorated its potential energies. . . .

A blinding current of fire flashed from the tip of the cone along the connecting cable as his fingers touched a spring. He released the spring and when the streak ceased, clambered up and tore away the cable from the top. Then, panting, he struggled to swing the cone-like mechanism around in its supporting gimbals.

He could not swing it, it was too heavy for him. The line of fighting men at the door was sagging inward as the rat-men pressed harder. Garry yelled frantically to Lenya, and as she pulled too at the great cone, it swung slowly over, its tip pointing toward the battle-filled door.

Garry leaped down, his fingers found the spring. He screamed to the fighting men over the wild roar of battle.

"D'Epernon! Haskins! Stand back from the door—all of you stand back!"

They heard his mad cry, and leaped back to either side of the entrance. The rat-men poured through the door.

Garry pressed frenziedly on the spring,

and from the tip of the conical mechanism a terrific blast of dazzling fire shot toward the inrushing rat-men. For moments the awful fire-blast flamed, and then vanished as Garry released the spring. In the doorway and outside it in the moonlight lay only scorched, distorted bodies of rat-men.

Those of the rat-men who had not been in the path of that awful outburst of atomic force, after staring a long minute, whirled and fled crazily toward the tunnels leading down to their lairs. In a few moments no living rat-man was in sight in moonlit Khmur.

Garry Winton sat down, quivering violently, as the others came running to him.

"By heaven, it was taking a chance," he said hoarsely. "I was afraid that even if I did manage to release the power, it would blow this whole place to fragments."

An hour later the mighty pylons of Khmur lay miles behind them in the moonlight as the little party of eight people moved southward through the jungle, the wolf-man leading the way.

"We'll go back, though," said Garry, to his comrades and the girl. "We'll study those mechanisms, learn how to operate them, wipe out the rat-men and all the other inimical monsters in this world. We could even live in Khmur and those other cities. *We* will be the Masters."

Lenya shook her head. "I will not let you go back there, ever. You will all stay with our tribe, become part of us."

In the moonlight Garry grinned at d'Epernon and Grappone, at the iron Crusader and the buccaneer and the Roman.

"It seems," he said, "that after thousands of years my adventuring days at last are over, and I'm going to settle down."

The Elder Gods

By W. L. HASTY, JR.

The gods my fathers knew are long since dead.
They rest in peace; their ghosts no longer walk
With silent steps through dusky rooms to talk
To men with dreaming eyes. They lie instead
Beneath great domes; the candle flames are red
And flicker low; the wax shines white as chalk.
Ah, bleeding lily on a broken stalk!
Dead in the void which echoes overhead. . . .
Drums throb dark passion in the reeking night;
Thronged blood-mad worshippers salute the dawn.
Grim, death-masked priests perform the dripping rite
And chant the mystery. Its lines have gone
Back through the mists, dissolving out of sight.
They drink the Life which they themselves have drawn.

Hollywood Horror

By PAUL ERNST

Doctor Satan, the world's weirdest criminal, in a powerful thrill-tale of blind, unreasoning fear and panic terror

1. Death in Life

THE central sound stage on the lot of the R-G-R Motion Picture Company was almost ready for the shooting of the main scene in the company's latest production. Outside the square, windowless concrete building the massive doors were being closed. In a moment the red light would burn which would keep anyone from entering and ruining the sound effect. Inside, all was tense activity and bustle.

The inside of the sound stage had an eery, cavernous look. One huge room, it was dark and shadowy at its outer fringes, and its high ceiling was lost in darkness. Shadows of people and things appeared like soundless prehistoric monsters.

Far above in the semi-darkness were shadowy platforms along which electricians were moving as they shifted scenic lights and equipment. An electric crane purred like a giant cat as it moved a heavy bit of scenery.

In the corner of the sound stage a set was being completed. It was for the picture, *Enchanted Castle,* in which the great star, Joan Harwell, had the leading role.

Men were hauling huge "sun-spots", incandescent globe spotlights, to platforms on three sides of the set. "Baby spots" also were being fixed in place to give a beautiful backlight effect on Miss Harwell's bronze hair.

All was prosaic, business-like, commonoplane to the moving-picture industry. And yet——

One of the electricians, who was trundling a baby spot into position, shivered suddenly. He was a small man, partly bald, with a sensitive, thin face. He had wide blue eyes which, at the moment, glistened with something more than apprehension in the dusk of the great stage.

He paused beside another electrician, a burly, phlegmatic man, as he got the spot to the right position to play on Miss Harwell's head when she sat in the divan around which the forthcoming scene centered. His hand touched the burly man's shoulder.

"Bill," he half whispered, looking embarrassedly around to make sure he wouldn't be overheard, "do you feel it too?"

● Here is another fascinating tale about that weird genius of crime who calls himself Doctor Satan. He is no madman, but is as sane as you or I. An immensely rich man, he has turned to crime for the thrill of it, and strikes down those in his path ruthlessly, heartlessly, and thoroughly. He is master of amazing powers that make him the world's weirdest criminal. If you have not yet made the acquaintance of this fearsome master of crime, meet him today in Paul Ernst's story, "Hollywood Horror." You have a literary treat in store.

"Success, and your doom, Ascott Keane!"

"Feel what?" grunted the big man.

The smaller man cleared his throat, plainly torn between a desire to speak what was in his mind, and a fear that he might be thought a fool. Desire won over fear.

"There's a kind of funny feel to this joint today," he muttered finally. "I've never noticed it in here before, but I can sure notice it this afternoon!"

"What are you talking about?" demanded the big man. "What kind of a feel?"

"I . . . don't exactly know how to describe it." The smaller man stared aloft at the spidery forms of workmen on the cat-walk, and then glanced almost fearfully at the set which had been constructed for the afternoon's shooting. "It gives me the willies, that's all."

The big man stared around, with his forehead wrinkling. "It's kind of quiet, like everybody was holding their breath," he said. "But it's always like that when we're about to shoot."

"No—it's more than that," babbled the smaller man. His hand on the big man's arm became a frantic clutch. "God, Bill, something's going to happen in here today. Something awful — some-

thing not on the director's program. I can feel it. I *know* it!"

He moistened dry lips.

"I remember once feeling like this when I was a kid. I've always been funny about feeling things—a spirit medium called me psychic, once. Anyway, this time I was just going into a picture show. I was about fourteen, I guess, and I went with a couple of other kids. When we got inside the theater I almost turned around and went out. I didn't know why. I just felt that something was going to—happen. I tried to get the others to leave with me, and they only laughed. I couldn't explain my feeling, you see. I said I felt that something terrible was going to happen in that theater, and we ought to get out before it did. But—they only laughed. We stayed."

EVEN in the half-light the whiteness of the man's face was perceptible.

"Bill, it happened, all right. That theater was the Mohawk Theater in Chicago. Everybody still remembers the name—and the fire that destroyed it and killed half the people in it. That was what happened, and I was the only one of the crowd of us who went in that got out alive."

He wiped sweat from his face.

"I feel now, today, just the way I felt that night, an hour before the fire! I feel now, this afternoon, that something awful is going to happen in this sound stage. Bill, should I say anything to the boss or the director—maybe get them not to shoot this scene today?"

The big man jerked his arm loose from the other's detaining hand. His phlegmatic face registered annoyance and contempt.

"Are you nuts? Sure, they'll put off shooting the scene for a day, with a forty-four thousand dollar payroll, just because you got a shivery feeling in your spine. I see 'em doing a thing like that!"

"But, Bill——" quavered the smaller man.

"You better get busy," said the other, briefly. "Come on, hop to it."

The two left the baby spot the smaller man had adjusted to illumine Miss Harwell's bronze, silky hair. The big man was scowling, and a sneer shaped his lips. But the smaller man looked almost ill, and his eyes glinted like the eyes of a frightened horse in the dimness.

Neither of the two noticed something it was, in a way, their business to see:

Taped inconspicuously to the power cable trailing from the spot that was to throw its rays on Miss Harwell's head was a fine bare wire. It entered the shell of the light along with the big cable. It was soldered, with the other, to the incandescent globe socket. And before this globe there was a lens that differed just a little in color from the glass of the other lenses.

A trifling difference. One any man could be forgiven for not seeing. But—it was a change that was to introduce to Hollywood a horror such as had never descended on the moving-picture industry before!

A TALL man with stoop shoulders adjusted a microphone at the end of a long boom. He stepped in front of it, called: "One, three, five, six, seven. . . ."

The voice of the monitor in the glass-enclosed booth came hollowly from a loud-speaker, like the voice of a ghost: "Okay on valve test."

Through the great outer doors came the director and the members of the cast who were to participate in the scene, two men who played minor roles, and Miss Harwell.

It is unnecessary to describe the great Joan Harwell. Before her untimely end, she was familiar to two-thirds of the

population of the country. Her silky, red-brown hair had dazzled millions of eyes with its soft sheen. Her large, brilliant eyes were the envy of the women of a nation. Her body, flawless in the delicate maturity of its curves, had stirred the pulses of a nation's men. A great beauty, she would have been outstanding in any period; one of those women who almost frighten the beholder by their perfection.

She was dressed in a creamy satin negligee which was to register white on the film. The negligee clung to her figure, accentuating its loveliness, and revealed perfect bare arms and throat. Above it her exquisite face and flame-brown hair were flower-like.

"Miss Harwell," said the director, a corpulent man with a bald head, "you know your lines?"

"Yes," she said, in the soft, well-modulated tone with which all the theater-goers in the world were familiar.

"We'll rehearse this living-room scene, then. . . . What is it? Don't you feel well?"

The director looked anxiously at the star's rather pale face, spotting the pallor in spite of her exaggerated make-up.

Joan Harwell hesitated a moment, with her red lips quivering. Then she smiled.

"I feel all right."

"You're sure? We've been working you pretty hard lately."

"I'm sure." The beautiful face continued in its smile, although the deep violet eyes were not smiling. "I felt a little cold for a moment, that's all. Not exactly cold—a little chilled, as though a cold, damp wind had touched me."

"I don't think there's any draft in here," said the director jovially, glancing at the solid walls. "Well, let's get on with it. I'll run over the scene again for you.

"You are to sit on that divan in the center of the set. You are to register happiness mixed with fear. The man you love is on his way to see you—but another man may reach him before he gets here with a malicious tale that may turn him against you. So you are in a fever of impatience, mad to hold him in your arms, ecstatic at one moment and at the next fearful that he may not come at all. Then the malicious tale-bearer comes in and announces that your lover is on his way back to the ship that will carry him out of your life for ever. You have lost. You go through the throes of grief and rage. . . . But I think you know the rest well enough. Take your place, please."

MISS HARWELL walked to the divan and sat down. Light in floods brought every detail of her face and form into relief as she reclined on the divan. She faced a little away from the bank of cameras.

"You're sure you feel all right?" persisted the director, staring at her violet eyes.

"Yes. I'm all right."

The director bit his lips, then shrugged. After all, this was only a rehearsal. The star's slightly strained look, for which he could think of no reason whatever, would not matter.

"More light on Miss Harwell's right cheek," he called.

The burly electrician moved a baby spot. The planes of the star's face leaped into higher relief.

"On the back of her head," said the director.

The man with the sensitive face and the wide, apprehensive eyes moved another small spot so that Miss Harwell's lustrous hair became a web of silky light.

And Joan Harwell shivered suddenly as that light touched her.

All noticed it, though none noticed that the last small spot to be moved was the one that had the fine bare wire subtly fastened to its power cable.

"Is the lens of that light clean?" snapped the director. "It seems just a shade off-color. . . . No, I guess my eyes are playing me tricks. All right, Miss Harwell."

Absolute silence reigned in the great sound stage. In it, workmen and actors, property man and director, stared at the nation's most beautiful woman who sat on the divan in the lacy negligee that molded limbs and body a sculptor could not have equaled.

The star swung into her part.

"He's coming," she whispered, just audibly for the microphone to catch it. "He'll be here soon . . . after nearly a year. . . ."

The director frowned. Her voice was strained, almost harsh. But her facial expression was all right. It registered happiness—mixed with fear. No, not fear. Horror! What ailed the girl?

The spotlights rayed on her face and body. The little spot that illuminated her hair seemed to burn with a faintly orange tint. . . .

The director, seated in his camp chair, gripped the rough wooden arms and stared with eyes that protruded from their sockets.

Joan Harwell's hair! What in heaven's name? . . .

It seemed to be fading from her head like a cobweb mist, revealing the lines of her skull!

The director blinked rapidly, and stared again. Was he going mad? The slight rasp of his panting shivered in the air. He was going insane—or blind!

"He'll be here soon," Miss Harwell whispered, "unless Tim reaches him first. . . ."

A sort of croak came from the director's throat, a rasping small sound of utter horror.

The beautiful lips that had murmured the words had become like the lustrous hair—misty, like substance of fog rather than of flesh. He could see her teeth through the lips!

The shivering sob of the small electrician near him in a way reassured the director, though the reassurance was a dreadful thing. For it told him that someone else was seeing what he saw.

"If Tim tells him that lie, and kills his love for me!" breathed the star. "But he won't! Fate couldn't be so unkind."

And now in the sound stage there was a paralysis of silence more terrible than wild shouts. Every eye was riveted on the star with chains of horror. Riveted on her face and head.

Something was happening to the beautiful face—something terrible and impossible beyond description — something of which Joan Harwell still seemed unaware, though the tone of her voice had grown more strained and odd with each word she uttered.

Her face was disappearing!

Shuddering, whimpering silently in his throat, gripping the arms of his chair, the director glared at the girl on the divan. And now the metamorphosis, progressing ever more swiftly, was complete. And Joan Harwell no longer had a countenance that could move men to rapture and women to envy.

Gone were the violet eyes and the straight small nose. Gone the silky hair and the creamy skin of cheeks and brow.

On the star's lovely throat a skull rested!

With a scream the director leaped from his chair. And his wild shriek broke the awful silence that chained the others in the sound stage. As one, they ran for the great outer doors, hiding their eyes from the thing of horror that now sat on

the divan; all but the burly electrician, who stood near the cameras and stared, with eyes that started from his head, at the thing that had been a woman.

A gorgeous body, seductively revealed by a cream satin negligee—but a body on which was nothing but a grinning skull!

"My God!" whimpered the one man who had stayed behind. "Oh, my God!"

"Harry!" shrilled Joan Harwell, getting up from the divan and turning toward the doors from which the men were hastening. "Harry — what is it? What has happened to me?"

The director did not answer. He did not turn back to look at her. Not for empires would he have gazed again at what had been sheer beauty. He ran from the doors and out into the afternoon sun. The star was alone with the shaking big man in coveralls who stared at her with twitching terror in his stupid face.

THE thing that had been Joan Harwell walked toward the man. The negligee, trailing from the perfect body, rustled in the stillness. The blanched white skull on the slender, lovely throat turned toward him.

"You," Joan Harwell's voice came from between teeth that chattered in their bony sockets, "for the love of heaven—tell me! What has happened?"

The man's nerve broke utterly at last. With a hoarse yell he turned from the glaring, hollow eye-sockets of the skull, and raced for the door to join the others.

The beautiful form in the clinging negligee stood beside the cameras. The ghastly skull turned this way and that.

"Gone! All of them! They ran from me. But what has *happened* to me?"

The lovely figure swayed. Then it walked unsteadily to a make-up box near the set, with the skull atop the creamy bare shoulders shining almost phosphorescently in the dimness. Death on lovely life! A pallid skull on a beautiful woman's body!

The thing that had been Joan Harwell stretched out a trembling arm and hand toward the make-up. Pink, tapering fingers opened it. In the lifted lid a mirror showed.

For perhaps ten seconds of frozen silence the glaring eye-sockets of the skull stared into the reflection of themselves. Then through the clenched and naked teeth scream on scream ripped forth.

People gathering outside the sound stage, drawn by the almost crazed director and workmen, heard those screams and shuddered. But none moved to enter the place. None dared!

And suddenly the frightful screams ceased. The pink fingers holding the lid of the make-up box slammed it down, shattering the mirror into a thousand pieces. In its place, the fingers caught up a pair of shears, keen, thin, long.

Straight and tall the figure stood—lovely as few women's bodies are lovely. Then a bare white arm went up. The shears glittered in the dimness of the sound stage; glittered more as they swept down and in; ceased glittering as they were bedded in flesh.

Joan Harwell fell, the negligee half covering a breast from which crimson poured, but with nothing covering the thing of horror that had been a flawless countenance crowned by bronze hair.

And now in a far corner of the great stage a shadow moved. It had seemed nothing but a mound of debris covered with tarpaulin. But now it took on human shape.

A tall, emaciated-looking figure stood erect. A black cloak covered it from heels to head. A dark felt hat with a down-drooping brim hid the head and part of the face. The rest of the face was covered by a red fabric mask.

The figure walked to the body of the dead star, and stared down. From eyeholes in the red mask, black eyes gazed callously at the skull set on the creamy throat. Then the felt hat moved as the man nodded.

Silently the figure moved from the body to the small spot that had been trained on Joan Harwell's head. Fingers sheathed in red rubber gloves ripped the bare fine wire loose from the power cable. Then the figure moved toward a smaller door in the sound stage leading into the property warehouse—where a secret exit could be made with the fine wire which was all the clue that might have explained the method by which a flawless face had been turned to fleshless ruin.

2. *Satan's Decree*

IN THE conference room flanking the private office of the president of the R-G-R Motion Picture Company, eight men sat. They were the wealthiest men of the industry, titans of the picture business. But they looked like anything but titans as they sat there.

The eight were frightened to the verge of collapse, and they showed it. Their faces, whether lean or chubby, were paper-white. Their hands trembled. Several smoked, sucked in great drafts from cigar or cigarette and expelling them again without really knowing what they were doing. And the eyes of all were turned toward the door marked: A. R. STANG, PRESIDENT.

In the big private office behind the closed door, there was a sight to evoke the same dread as that inspired the day before in the sound stage when Joan Harwell gazed into a mirror and saw why men ran from her.

Stang, the president, shivered in a huge leather chair next to the big desk across which normally flowed the business of R-G-R. But no business was flowing now. The desk was bare. And beside it, a fantastic creature, cowered Stang. Or the thing Stang had become!

The president's corpulent body remained untouched. But his left forearm and hand were the hand and forearm of a skeleton! Like bony twigs his fingers writhed and clenched while he sat there gazing at them; gazing out of sockets as eyeless as Joan Harwell's had been yesterday! For on the thick neck of the man was no longer placed a head. A skull was there, blanched, pallid, naked bone.

No sound came from the fleshless mouth. Sounds had been worn out. For eighteen hours Stang had cowered in the office, unable to drag himself out of it to face the horrified stares of the rest of the world. For eighteen hours he had screamed and cursed, raving for those who knocked at the office door to go away.

Now the first person to come into the big room was pacing up and down before him and shaking his head while he said with stiff lips: "I don't know what to do. I've been a practising physician for twenty-eight years, and I've never seen anything like it. You haven't any idea what caused the change?"

The skull on Stang's shoulders spoke.

"I have no idea at all. I was sitting at my desk, bent over. I was writing. Just a check, so I didn't bother to light my desk lamp—I sat with only the light from the overhead fixture shining down on my head and hand. Maybe that light . . . but how could a light do—*this*—to me?"

He raised his skeletal left hand and forearm. The doctor's nails bit into his palms as he repressed a shudder.

"I didn't feel anything much. I recall feeling cold, as if a dank wind had touched me. That was all. The first thing that told me of the change was my

secretary's behavior. She came into the office, stared at me as though she'd suddenly been turned to stone, and fainted. And I've been in here ever since. . . . Doctor, for God's sake, do something!"

The doctor walked toward the door.

"I'll do everything humanly possible. But first I've got to try to find out what is wrong. I'll take this sample of your flesh down to the laboratory and report back as soon as I can."

HE OPENED the office door, with a reflection in his eyes of the panic that had filled the eyes of those who had fled from Joan Harwell, and went into the conference room.

The eight executives in there surrounded him.

"Doctor—what causes it?"

"Is it some new disease? Is it contagious?"

"Is it controllable?" rasped one who held crumpled in his fist a sheet of notepaper.

The doctor brushed them aside with a weary wave of his hand.

"Gentlemen, I know nothing yet. I can only tell you what I told Mr. Stang. As soon as I find out something I'll report."

"But what could strip the flesh off a human being's bones like that?" demanded a short fat man whose high voice was like a squeal. "And how can a person live in such a condition?"

"The flesh is not stripped off," said the doctor, moistening his lips. "That at least I have found out. I found it out by feeling of the affected parts. The flesh is still there, gentlemen. Mr. Stang's head is not a naked skull. Hair and flesh and eyes and features are still there. But in some unguessable way they have been made invisible, or transparent. The flesh is as it always was—but it is as translucent as so much spring water, so that all you can see is the bony structure underneath. Similarly with his left hand. So it is not as bad as we feared."

"Not as bad!" squealed the fat man. "Does it make it any the less frightful that the skull is not really a naked skull? To the eyes of all beholders, it is only dead bone!"

"An illusion," the doctor began shakily.

"Hell, man! In a case like this illusion is as ghastly as reality. Stang can never mingle in the world again, like that. At a stroke he has been made into a thing that is dead even though still alive. You've got to do something!"

The doctor shrugged, opened his lips as though to retort, and then went on out of the conference room. Behind him, the eight reseated themselves at the big oval table.

"Gentlemen, we're beaten," said the man who held the sheet of notepaper in his hand. "We will have to follow the demands of this outrageous letter."

He straightened the crumpled paper and read again that message which any of the eight could have repeated word for word from having read it so many times already:

Bertrand C. Phillips, President of Acme Pictures, Incorporated: You will arrange to pay me five hundred thousand dollars by tomorrow at midnight. You will also instruct your star, Dorothy Dean, to pay to me the three hundred and eighty thousand dollars she has invested in Government bonds. If the payments are not made, she will suffer the fate of Joan Harwell, and you shall become as A. R. Stang—whom I advise you to visit immediately in company with other motion picture heads. His appearance may be an object lesson. Signed, DOCTOR SATAN.

The man with the letter looked around the circle of faces.

"Bertrand Phillips," he said. "That's me. And if I don't pay, I'll have a skull for a head and enter into a life in death such as lies before Stang. If I do pay, and persuade Miss Dean to pay, it will be only a beginning of the schemes of

this man who calls himself Doctor Satan. Every one of you will have to give in to the same threat in turn. And then all of us will have to keep on, paying millions to the fellow."

The little fat man shook his head like a scared, bewildered child.

"But nobody can do a thing like that! Making flesh transparent over bone so that only the bone is seen, like a living skeleton! It can't be done."

"The only answer is that it has been done," the other man ground out. "I'm going to pay, personally. I'll pay Miss Dean's share too, if she should refuse to do as Doctor Satan demands. Her head is worth more than three hundred and eighty thousand dollars to me. Not to mention my own!"

"Is there no way out, then?"

"None, gentlemen, as far as I can see. A man who could perform such miracles of horror as were performed on Stang and Joan Harwell is a man far beyond the reach of law or the police." He sagged lower in his chair. "I repeat, we're beaten——"

THE outer door of the conference room opened. A man stood on the threshold an instant, then calmly came into the room. He was tall, dressed in dark gray that masked the width of his shoulders and the muscularity of his athletic frame. Steely gray eyes peered out from under black eyebrows. The eyes, combined with a large but aristocratic-looking nose, gave him a hawk-like appearance.

"Who are you?" squalled the little fat man in feeble wrath. His fear and uncertainty in the last hours came out in a burst of rage against the intrusion. "What are you doing in this room? We left orders that no one was to come in here!"

The man's large, firm mouth moved in a grim smile.

"Your orders were observed by your office help," he said. "Or, they would have been observed—but I walked past them out there and came in anyway."

"Who are you, anyhow?"

"My name," said the man, "is Ascott Keane——"

"Keane? Keane! That means nothing to me. I never heard of you——"

"Just a minute," the voice of the man with the letter cut across the little fat man's voice. "That name means something to *me!* Ascott Keane. . . . Aren't you a criminologist? From New York?"

Keane nodded.

"You're a sort of under-cover man, working for no one but yourself? You tackle the big crime cases, sometimes when the regular police don't even know the cases exist?"

Again Keane nodded.

"For God's sake," quavered Phillips, "sit down and talk this over with us. I don't know if you realize it, but a man like you couldn't have come here at a better time!"

ASCOTT KEANE looked at the letter Phillips handed him. He didn't even bother to read it. The signature, Doctor Satan, was all he needed to see.

His steel-gray eyes turned toward Phillips.

"I didn't come here by any accident," he said quietly. "I came knowing I would find some such thing as this in Hollywood. I saw the news flashes yesterday about the hideous thing that had happened to Miss Harwell. Within a half-hour I was on a plane, with my secretary, Beatrice Dale, headed this way. At the airport when I landed I overheard a man talking of what had happened to Stang here. The man was on his way out of California, afraid it might happen to him too. So I came here at once, to place my services at your disposal."

"If you will," babbled the little fat man, "if you only will—well, you can name your own fee."

Keane's grim smile appeared again.

"I happen to be fairly wealthy, gentlemen. I am not working against Doctor Satan for fees. I'm working"—his eyes flamed—"to rid the world of a monster that will be emperor of all crime if he can't be destroyed!"

Phillips clutched his trembling hands together.

"A man who can do what he has done," he said, "could be emperor of the world, I'd think. Who is he, Mr. Keane? You seem to know of him already."

"I know very little. I don't know his identity, nor does anyone else on earth. But I do know that his is a name that is internationally famous for family wealth and power. I know that he is a man in the prime of life, who has become jaded with the pleasures of wealth and has turned to crime of a sort so advanced and bizarre that nothing like it has ever been known before—crime, incidentally, that must pay, in the end. That is one of the rules of his game. Though he is perhaps richer than any of you here, he must get money from his crimes or they would not be successful and he would not get his thrill from his grim play."

The little fat man clutched his arm.

"You can stop him, can't you?" he squealed. "You can force him to leave Hollywood? Money! Successful crime! He'll get all the wealth of all of us if he can't be stopped."

"I can do my best," murmured Keane. "Can any of you men give me a hint or clue of how the change was wrought in Stang or Joan Harwell?"

The eight looked at each other. Finally Phillips said: "I don't think any of us can give you a bit of help. I doubt if Stang himself can." His voice sank to a fearful whisper. "I wonder where Doctor Satan is, here in Hollywood. And I wonder if he has prepared my fate, and that of Dorothy Dean, already."

3. *The Heart of the Web*

THE motion picture industry is still a new one; and R-G-R is not a pioneer company. None of its buildings is very old. But one of them, the property warehouse, was old enough so that all but a few veteran workmen had forgotten one feature of its construction.

Under the north end of the warehouse was a deep circular pit. At one time the mechanism for a large, buried, movable stage had been in that pit; a stage set beside the original, smaller warehouse. Then the stage had been discarded, the warehouse had needed enlarging, and workmen had floored the unused pit and built the warehouse out over it.

Dark, secret, forgotten, it had yawned beneath the cement floor untouched for years. But it was untouched and forgotten no longer.

Less than four hundred yards from the conference room in which eight executives sat in pallid fear, the pit teemed now with activity.

In the center was a big electric motor, once the power source of the movable stage mechanism; then left to rust, out-moded; now cleaned and repaired again. It was running, sending out a low hum that filled the round pit with a murmuring noise.

Beside it were three men—one normal and average, the other two like gargoyles out of a nightmare.

The one was a workman in coveralls with rubber-insulated pliers in his hand. He shrank from the other two as he stood there. And no wonder.

One of these two was a giant of a man with no legs, who moved about between

his swinging arms with an astonishing speed and agility. The other was a small fellow with matted hair over his face through which pale, cruel eyes peered like those of a sadistic monkey. The legless giant was Bostiff, servant of Doctor Satan. The smaller man was Girse, another henchman.

"I tell you this old motor won't hold together much longer," chattered the man in coveralls. "I didn't think I'd ever get it in working order in the first place."

"You got it in working order," rumbled Bostiff, "because you'd have been killed if you hadn't. You'll keep it in working order for the same reason."

"What are you using it for, anyhow?" babbled the workman. "And how long are you going to hold me here?"

A sinister smile appeared on Bostiff's stupid, savage face.

"We'll hold you here as long as we need an electrician," he growled. "As for what the motor is used for—it's to make things happen to women like Joan Harwell and men like that damn rich man, Stang!"

"But how in the name of——"

"Shut up," snapped Bostiff, cracking the flat of his huge hand against the electrician's mouth.

The electrician staggered back, with blood flowing from his lips. And as he did so, a red light near the roughly cut entrance of the circular pit snapped on and off.

"It's *him!*" said Girse, hopping monkey-like toward the entrance.

Bostiff drew his gigantic body up on the backs of his hands as though standing to attention. Girse opened the door.

A figure came through that was as bizarre and extraordinary as something cut from a book of ancient illustrations; a figure that looked as though made up for the part of Lucifer in some ghastly masquerade.

A red robe sheathed its gauntness as a red scabbard might sheathe a lean blade. Red rubber gloves covered the hands; a red mask concealed the face save for burning black eyes; over the hair was a red skull-cap with two small knobs like sardonic devil's horns.

"Doctor Satan," murmured Bostiff hoarsely.

The electrician whimpered and drew back from the sinister form in red. Doctor Satan's jet-black eyes flicked over the unfortunate man, noting the blood oozing from his cut lips.

"He has been trying to get away?" he asked Bostiff.

The legless giant shook his head. "Not that. He feared he could not keep this old equipment running."

The red mask over Doctor Satan's face moved a bit, as though to a smile.

"He will keep it running," came the arrogant, flat voice. "He loves life."

Doctor Satan turned toward Girse. The little man's pale eyes wavered under the impact of the coal-black ones glaring from the eye-holes in the mask.

"Girse, there is more for you to do. Take the fine wire and run it from this pit to the R-G-R conference room. Attach it there to the light socket over the third chair on the left-hand side of the big table. The third chair, Girse! Make no mistake! It is in that chair that Bertrand Phillips sits."

An evil chuckle came from the masked lips.

"Because that light gives diffused illumination instead of a beam of it like a spotlight, we shall be unable to control the rays quite so thoroughly. It will be amusing to see the result—if Phillips defies me. He might become a partial skeleton from the waist up, instead of merely exchanging a normal head for a skull."

"The wire is to be laid from this pit

to the third light on the left side of the conference table," muttered Girse, parrot-like. "It shall be done, Master. And it is to be attached at this end?"

"To the transformer," nodded Doctor Satan. He paused an instant, then said harshly: "This man has not been allowed to examine that transformer?"

Bostiff stared with dull ferocity at the electrician.

"He has not," he said.

DOCTOR SATAN walked to one wall of the pit, near the humming old motor. A cable led from the motor to a black box leaning against this wall. Doctor Satan raised the lid of the box. Over his red-robed shoulder could have been observed a maze of cobweb wires in the box, with vacuum tubes studding the maze and glass terminals at the wire's ends. From the opposite end of the box came a small length of the fine wire that had led to the baby spot in the sound stage. To this would be spliced the wire leading to the conference room.

Doctor Satan's Luciferian head moved in a gesture of satisfaction.

"All is ready. Prepare the wiring, Girse. And—if by the luck of the devil, my master, you should see Ascott Keane, you know what to do. If you can!"

Bostiff started. His dull eyes swung toward the red mask.

"Keane?" he croaked.

"Yes." The word hissed from the masked lips. "He is here. In Hollywood. He is to be killed at sight."

THE eight men who headed the motion picture industry of the nation were in the R-G-R conference room at eleven-fifty next night. They faced Ascott Keane, who sat at the head of the board.

Bertrand Phillips' face was dewed with sweat. He kept staring at the clock, and running his tongue over his dry lips.

"In ten minutes," he said huskily, "if the payment is not made I am to become as Stang became! Keane, I must make that payment!"

Keane shook his head. His face was pale, tense.

"Payment would only put off your fate. You would pay—and pay again. There would come a time when you could pay no longer, and then Doctor Satan would strike. For he must keep terror alive in the hearts of others, and to do that he must give a horrible object lesson at regular intervals."

"But what can we do? You have found out nothing. You admit it."

"No, I have not admitted it. I have found out a little. I have found out how Doctor Satan creates his ghastly illusion, for one thing. The man has devised a ray that changes the molecular arrangement of flesh. The ray, playing on flesh, so lines up the atoms of which that flesh is composed, that they fade from the range of vision of the average eye. It is as if a cloud of dust particles were so shaken as to line the particles up one behind the other. The cloud would become a thing of straight lines, seen end on, and hence not seen at all."

"But how is the ray controlled? From what place can it come?"

"I don't know," said Keane.

"And where does this Doctor Satan hide? Such a ray would mean equipment of some sort. Perhaps bulky equipment. Where is it concealed?"

"I don't know."

Phillips sprang from the chair he habitually used and paced up and down the room, with the eyes of the others following him.

"I can't stand the strain any longer! I want to pay!" He mopped at his forehead. "Fancy going through the rest of my life as Stang is doomed to do! Unless he kills himself. . . ."

He stopped abruptly, and a look of terror froze his face.

"Do you hear it?" he whispered, after a moment.

Ascott Keane stared at him. "Hear what?"

"A voice." His whisper shivered in the conference room. "A voice! I heard it distinctly. It said: 'Remember — at midnight! Pay, or doom overtakes you at midnight!"

Frozen silence chained the room for an instant. Then the eyes of all swung back to Keane.

"Telepathy," said Keane quietly. "There was no voice. The words grew in your brain, Phillips. But I think it means that Doctor Satan is very near us."

"I'm afraid!" panted Phillips. "Keane —what are you going to do?"

"I've told you. We will wait here till midnight. Satan will strike then, or attempt to. And the nature of the attack—and its source—will determine my next move."

"But he strikes at me!" sobbed Phillips. "At *me!* If you can't act quickly enough——"

He stopped and stared at the clock. Two minutes of twelve. With a groan he sank into his chair again and buried his face in his hands.

Keane stared at him with pity in his steely eyes, though inexorable purpose shaped his countenance. Then his eyes, too, sought the clock. A minute and a half to twelve. A minute. . . .

How did Doctor Satan project his diabolical ray? How could he control the invisible current that made flesh transparent so that the bony structure beneath, whose mineral content no doubt made it impervious to the ray, could be made so hideously plain?

Forty seconds to twelve o'clock.

Phillips' breathing rasped through the silence. The little fat man choked out a curse. The rest of the picture executives held their breaths.

Thirty seconds. There was a slight flicker of the lights. . . .

"Out of that chair!" yelled Ascott Keane, springing up so swiftly that his own chair was overturned. "That's how he does it! The lights! *Out of that chair!*"

PHILLIPS stared at him in dazed lack of comprehension, with a kind of bleating noise coming from his lips. Keane bounded toward him.

"*Move, man!* Damn it—then——"

Keane's arm shot out. His hand clutched Phillips' coat collar and he pulled backward with all his strength. Phillips shot back against the wall, crying aloud, and Keane, with a leap and a smash of his hand, broke the light bulb in the ceiling over the spot where the man had been sitting.

Then, in the pandemonium of men unused to action and made into terrified animals by the nearness of peril, Keane looked grimly at his hand.

The fingers of that hand looked as if they had suddenly been turned to frosted glass. They were not quite opaque. In them could faintly be seen the outline of finger and knuckle bones. Doctor Satan's ray had accomplished a fraction of its deadly purpose before the bulb had been smashed.

"*Touché,*" he whispered. "A slight, partial victory for you, Doctor Satan. But also, I think, the beginning of the end."

He stared at the light socket.

"Of course! It came from the lights! I should have thought of it instantly. Joan Harwell's flesh became invisible when the spotlights were played on her. Stang's head changed under the ceiling light above his desk. The lights! With Satan's ray traveling along their beams!" He placed a chair beneath the shattered fixture, and examined it closely.

A fine bare wire came into view, soldered deftly to the socket, and threading up through the plaster of the ceiling with the main light wire. Disregarding the men who babbled and clutched at his arm, and who stared with horrified eyes at the milky fingers of his right hand, he walked to the window and leaned out.

The rays of a small flashlight showed him more of the fine wire stretched unobtrusively down the outside wall of the building. Down the wall, to the ground. And at the other end of that wire. . . .

"Gentlemen," Keane's vibrant voice cut across the din, "I shall see you soon. And I think I will have conclusive news!"

He went down and out of the building, and around beneath the window. Off into the night the fine wire ran, so inconspicuously that it would never have been seen by eyes not searching specially for it.

Off into the night—toward the great dark building which was R-G-R's property warehouse!

Drawing a deep breath, Keane started tracing the wire—to the source of the ray and, he prayed, the man who had devised it.

4. Black Box of Death

In the pit beneath the property warehouse, Doctor Satan stood with his head bowed a little as though listening. He stood near the secret door, with Girse and Bostiff near him.

Behind the big electric motor, the electrician lay with eyes closed as though asleep. But under the fringe of his lashes he was watching the three near the door. And now and then, at long intervals, he moved a little. His movement was always in one direction—toward the mysterious black box to which a cable ran from the motor and from which a fine bare wire trailed on the opposite end from the cable.

Girse and Bostiff hardly breathed as they watched their master. The red-masked face lowered a bit more. They stared in silent respect, careful not to distract him.

They knew what Doctor Satan was doing. They had seen him do it often before.

Somewhere in the night outside, there was a person in whom Doctor Satan was vitally interested. He was reading that person's mind, through his marvelously advanced telepathic powers.

Suddenly the red-robed form stiffened. The red mask moved with words.

"Phillips will pay," the harsh, arrogant voice rang out. "He has escaped the doom of the ray. Someone suspected the source, and broke the light bulb. Ascott Keane, probably." The red-gloved hands clenched. "But Phillips will pay. He has just telephoned his home to deliver to whatever messenger calls for it the package of currency he made up before Keane persuaded him to hold off. Girse, you will call for that package. First, as you go out, remove the wire from this pit to the conference room before it is traced. Then go to Phillips' home."

A malevolent chuckle sounded from the covered lips.

"Half a million dollars! And it is only a beginning——"

The words stopped with awful suddenness, and the coal-black eyes glaring from the mask's eye-holes began to gleam like fire opals.

Doctor Satan turned suddenly, and stared at the black box from which the fine wire ran. He stared also at the figure beside it.

The electrician had edged his way from the motor to the box. Leaning on one elbow, with his terrified gaze going constantly to the ominous red form by the door, he had raised the lid, and was peering in at the maze of wires and tubes the box housed.

The man cried out, a low, choked exclamation. There was no chance for him to pretend sleep as he had done before. Satan had whirled and caught him as though he'd had eyes in the back of his head and had watched all along.

No chance to conceal his fatal curiosity! The man could only stare, panting, into the awful black eyes, with his hand still holding open the lid of the box.

Doctor Satan walked slowly toward him. On either side, Girse and Bostiff moved with him. The terrible three advanced soundlessly, save for the slight rasp of Bostiff's calloused knuckles on the floor as he propelled his great body forward.

The man screamed, and cowered away from the box. He got to his feet, wildly, and tried to run. But there was no place to run to.

Girse got him on one side, and Bostiff on the other. They dragged him to confront Doctor Satan. The eyes behind the eye-holes in the mask were like small black windows into hell.

"So," murmured Doctor Satan, "you were curious to see what was in the box."

His red-sheathed arms folded themselves across his chest. His voice was as soft as satin—and as deadly as a snake's hiss.

"Scientific curiosity," he purred. "The inquisitiveness of the trained man. It is an odd thing. You are a prisoner here, afraid for your life—and rightly. But in the same room with you there is a bit of electrical equipment such as you have never seen before. Mysterious equipment. A new invention. And you must look. With death staring you in the face, you can still be moved by that professional inquisitiveness! The human animal is an odd object."

The man held by Girse and Bostiff said nothing. It was doubtful if he heard the words, or, hearing, understood them. He stood there, half fainting in the grasp of the sinister two, staring at the death in the coal-black eyes.

"So you would have read the secret of my ray," the arrogant, calm voice went on, "and perhaps have exploited it for your own profit when you got out of here! Fool, you will never leave here. I could not have let you live, in any case, to bear witness as to what happened here. Now I am doubly forced to remove you."

The red-clad form seemed to grow, to tower taller in the low, cement-covered pit.

"Girse! Bostiff! Stand aside!"

THE two released the man and moved away from him. The electrician sank to his knees, unable to support his weight on his trembling legs.

"I saw nothing!" he chattered. "I learned nothing! I swear——"

He stopped. His lips continued to move for a moment, but no more words came. His eyes were like those of a bird paralyzed by a serpent as he kneeled there.

"You wanted the secret of the box?" purred Doctor Satan. "Well, you shall have it. But it will be a different secret from the one you already have an inkling of. That transformer of mine has two functions. The primary ray it can produce re-alines molecules to make them invisible. The secondary ray causes atoms to collapse."

The coal-black eyes beneath the mask burned more fiercely yet.

"Have you ever speculated on what would happen if atoms collapsed? Matter is nothing but a few atoms moving within certain confines. The rest is space. Your body, for example, is not a solid at all, really. It would be interesting to see what would happen if the atoms of your body were compacted to their limits."

Gasping, the man stared at him. Doctor Satan moved to the box, with his eyes constantly impaling his victim. He reached within. A tiny light glowed in the side of the box. Doctor Satan trained its rays on the electrician.

The man began to scream. The agony of hell was in those screams. But he did not move. His body twitched and jerked, but seemed incapable of muscular action.

On and on the screams continued, but gradually they changed tone. They grew higher, shriller in pitch, keeping time in their change of pitch with a phenomenal change in the man's body.

It was growing steadily smaller!

With poorly concealed terror in their eyes, Girse and Bostiff watched the fate of Doctor Satan's latest victim. They watched him shrivel from a man to a figure the size of a child. It was like peering down a telescope through the wrong end; a telescope so adjusted as to reduce an adult form to a statuette the size of a doll.

On and on the unfortunate man screamed. But now the screams were like the shrilling of an insect, piercing the ear-drums in the upper reaches of sound, but still scarcely audible.

"My God!" whispered Bostiff at last.

The man was a thing two inches high, that peered up and up at the towering giants in the mile-high room. Girse and Bostiff bent far down to see, keeping carefully out of the ray's beam. And they saw that the feebly shrilling, tiny thing that had been a human being was sinking into the packed earth that made the floor of the pit.

"Small as he is," the calm, harsh voice of Doctor Satan droned out, "he weighs as much as ever. And a thing two inches tall and weighing a hundred and sixty or seventy pounds will sink through pretty solid substance."

Now the ear could no longer hear the tiny shrilling of the man's screams. And the eye could no longer see him save as a blot, a pinpoint. The pinpoint remained the same in size. . . .

Doctor Satan turned off the deadly little light. Girse and Bostiff bent till their eyes were within six inches of the pinpoint. . . .

It was a hole in the hard-packed earth. A hole that might have been made by a fine needle. Down that hole the man had sunk. To where? God knew! Such concentrated weight might stop with the first rock layer of the earth's crust—or it might sink and sink till earth's center was reached! Either way, a slight threat to Doctor Satan's peace of mind had been removed.

THE pit was very quiet as, sweating, Bostiff looked up at Doctor Satan again. The red-robed figure was moving convulsively. And with horror in even his savage heart, Bostiff read the meaning of the movement.

Doctor Satan was laughing! The doom he had meted out to the man was amusing to him!

"At least he will see things, if he lives, that no human eyes have ever seen before——" Doctor Satan began.

But the sentence was never finished.

Another voice rang out in the pit, the voice of neither Girse nor Bostiff nor their hellish master.

"Perhaps he will sink far enough to pay his respects to the demon you emulate, if there is a devil and a deep-buried hell."

A monkey-like cry came from Girse's lips, and a rasping exclamation from the thick lips of Bostiff. Doctor Satan whirled toward the door with his hands clenched so hard over the rim of the black box that it seemed as if the red gloves must split.

"Ascott Keane! By heaven——"

Keane walked slowly forward from the door to which he had trailed the wire. He was empty-handed. He needed no weapons for defense from such as Bostiff and Girse; and he knew that no ordinary weapons could injure Doctor Satan. But it was eery to see him walk, without apparent defense, into the lair of the cold-blooded monster in red.

"You trailed the wire," breathed Doctor Satan. "You found me—and you came alone. It is more than I could have hoped for."

Suddenly his body moved convulsively again. And Bostiff and Girse saw that again he was laughing, but with a laughter now more terrible than that with with which he had watched the disappearance of the electrician.

"More than I could have hoped for, Ascott Keane. You came—but you shall not leave as you entered!"

"That's what you said when I found you beneath the graveyard in New York," said Keane. "But I left—and you very nearly stayed behind, dead!"

Doctor Satan's laughter stopped. His eyes glowed with cold triumph.

"That time I did not have the black box. This time I have. *And you shall receive its emanations as the other did!*"

With the words his red-gloved hand flashed down. The tiny light glowed again—with its rays leveled straight at Keane.

Keane shouted once, a yell of agony, then was silent. But he was not silent because the agony had ceased. The torture of that beam of light was a thing that tripled by the second, a thing that knocked the breath from his body and seemed to sear him in flame.

With legs wide apart, he stood there like a figure of stone, unable to move a muscle. And as he stood there, he became smaller.

From Doctor Satan's masked lips came a grating cry more eloquent of triumph than the waving pennants of a victorious army.

"I've got you!"

Ascott Keane's once tall frame had dwindled till his head was almost on a level with the head of the legless Bostiff. And still he stood there, braced on wide-spread legs, glaring at the figure in red.

"Success, and your doom, Ascott Keane!"

Doctor Satan moved closer to his victim, along the side of the clear-cut path of the beam. He thrust his red-covered face down close to Keane's face, which was a mask of agony.

"Watch out!" screamed Girse.

But the words came too late. Already, Keane had moved.

His right hand shot out and clutched Doctor Satan's red-robed shoulder. His left gripped the fabric of the robe at his throat.

Indescribable amazement and almost superstitious fear glinted in the black eyes of the man who had roused such awe and such superstitious fear in others.

"My God!" he gasped. "My God! You moved! But you can't move! No one can move with the paralysis of the beam on him! It's . . . impossible . . . but you did. . . ."

The hoarse, astounded words ended in a scream that was a faint echo of the shriek of the electrician. For Keane had pulled the red-cloaked figure before him so that the light from the black box caught it directly.

"See — how — you — like — it," whispered Keane, between gasps of agony.

BOSTIFF and Girse leaped forward. They clutched at Doctor Satan's robe and tried to tear him from Keane's grasp. But though his hands were so small that they looked like the hands of a child,

they held their grip. His body was shrunken, but all its weight and all its muscle texture was left. He held the man with an unbreakable clutch.

"The light!" screamed Doctor Satan thinly. "Turn it—off!"

Both Girse and Bostiff leaped toward the black box, Girse bounded monkey-like over the earth floor, Bostiff swinging in great loops on his thick arms.

"Quick!"

Girse fumbled in the box and apparently found no switch, for the deadly light continued to shine, and the red-robed form continued to shrink in size. He looked at Bostiff.

The legless giant growled something impotently, and caught up a hammer. He raised it over the box.

"No, no!" Doctor Satan shrieked. "The ray must be reversed! Don't wreck the transformer!"

Bostiff dropped the hammer. Girse continued to fumble. The red-clad body was now less than four feet tall, scarcely an inch taller than Keane's grim, compacted frame.

"Behind the light!" choked Doctor Satan. "Girse——"

His racked cry stopped, as the light did. Girse had found the switch. Agony rolled from Keane. He could breathe again. But he kept his clutch on Doctor Satan.

Keane spoke. His voice was piping because of his shortened vocal cords. But there was no lack of relentlessness in it.

"Make me as I was before, or you die!"

"You can't kill me!" raved Doctor Satan, trying fruitlessly to break Keane's grip. "No man can kill me!"

"You thought it was impossible for any mortal to move while in the path of the atom-compacting beam," said Keane. "But I moved. You have occult as well as scientific methods of fighting—but so have I. I've come to close grips with you at last. You'll go to the devil, your maker, at once, if you don't do as I say."

"Bostiff! Girse!" panted Doctor Satan.

The two swung in on Keane. But, with their arms reaching for him, they stopped. His steely eyes were drilling into theirs, now Bostiff's, now Girse's. Under that hypnotic gaze they seemed to congeal.

"The switch, Girse," snapped Keane, moving Doctor Satan as he spoke, till he was in the path of light instead of the red-robed body. "Move it backward—and we'll see what happens."

"Girse—don't move!" panted Doctor Satan. "You hear me——"

Girse moved like a sleepwalker toward the box.

"Girse——" It was a cry of maniacal rage from the red-masked lips.

But the monkey-like man went on, with Keane's power in the ascendency even over Satan's. His hand found the switch. The light in the box snapped on.

In no particular did the light seem to differ from that which had flashed like a baleful eye to collapse the atoms in a man's body and shrink him in stature. Yet, now, under what seemed the same beam, Keane's stature increased.

To five feet he grew, to six. His face was a stony mask of triumph—tempered by the fact that Doctor Satan grew as he did. The rays filtered through his body, apparently, to affect the red-robed body he had tried to block from the light.

"Enough," he snapped.

Moving mechanically, Girse turned the switch. Once more the light went out. And now Keane saw a curious thing. His half-transparent right hand, affected in the conference room, had become opaque again! In the beam, that had been altered back to normal along with his stature.

At every point in this encounter with Doctor Satan, he had won! Now he had

only to destroy that black box by the wall, and then destroy its master. . . .

With all the tiger strength in his big body, he thrust the red-robed figure suddenly from him and leaped toward the box. Doctor Satan staggered back against the wall. But his jet-black eyes suddenly flamed savage hope instead of impotent rage.

KEANE did not see the change in expression. He was too intent on catching up the hammer Bostiff had dropped, too sure he had won completely.

He raised the hammer over the box, with Girse and Bostiff making no move to stop him. Doctor Satan's eyes flared like live coals. . . .

"And now, damn you, you're next!" grated Keane, bringing down the hammer on all the intricate and delicate apparatus in the box as if it were the red-covered skull he struck.

There was a soft explosion. Rays of blue flame leaped from the black box, bathing Keane in malevolent fire.

He choked, cried out, and staggered back. Still a third secret the box had yielded: almost certain destruction to him who wrecked it!

A snarl like that of a victorious animal came from Satan's lips. He stared at his two men, and, stirring as though waking from sleep, they moved toward him with Keane's occult chains broken. The blue flame licked at Keane's body.

"And so you die," rasped Doctor Satan, staring at him. "You have stopped me again. But this is the last time you'll interfere in my plans."

With Girse and Bostiff following him, Satan left the pit. And behind them, as the door closed, Ascott Keane lay with death playing through his body from the wrecked black box. . . .

The hum of the motor beside him grew to a wail, a scream, and then with a grinding roar subsided into silence. With no constantly tending hand to keep it running, the motor had at last burned out. Blind fate had rescued Keane.

But Doctor Satan did not know that. He was not, after all, infallible. Grimly confident, he left for dead a man who was already stirring feebly, to recover almost within the hour and play the part of Satan's nemesis once more.

Another gripping tale about Doctor Satan, the world's weirdest criminal, will appear next month. In it Doctor Satan will throw the automobile industry of Detroit into stark terror. Reserve your copy at your news dealer's now

"Sick to the very soul with the closeness of the Thing, he fought."

The Cold Gray God

By C. L. MOORE

Was there ever such a duel in the whole universe as the one between Northwest Smith and the nameless being that fought him in that Martian room?
—a gripping tale by the author of "Shambleau"

SNOW fell over Righa, pole city of Mars. Bitter snow, whirling in ice-hard particles on the thin, keen wind that always seems to blow through Righa's streets. These cobblestoned ways were nearly empty today. Squat stone houses crouched low under the assaults of that storm-laden wind, and the dry

snow eddied in long gusts down the reaches of the Lakklan, Righa's central street. The few pedestrians along the Lakklan huddled collars high about their ears and hurried over the cobbles.

But there was one figure in the street that did not hurry. It was a woman's figure, and by the swing of her gait and the high poise of her head one might guess that she was young, but it would be no more than a guess, for the fur cloak she clutched about her muffled every line of her body and the peaked hood of it hid her face. That fur was the sleek white hide of the almost extinct saltland snow-cat, so that one might presuppose her wealth. She walked with a swinging grace rarely encountered in Righa's streets. For Righa is an outlaw city, and young women, wealthy and beautiful and unattended, are seldom seen upon the Lakklan.

She strolled slowly down the broad, uneven way, her long, hooded cloak making a white enigma of her. But she was somehow alien to this bleak, bitter scene. That almost dancing litheness which attended her motion, eloquent even through the concealing folds of rich snow-cat fur, was not a characteristic of Martian women, even the pink beauties of the canals. Indefinably she was foreign—exotically foreign.

From the shadow of her hood an eager gaze roved the street, avidly scanning the few faces she passed. They were hard-featured faces for the most part, bleak and cold as the gray city about them. And the eyes that met hers boldly or slyly, according to the type of passer-by, were curiously alike in their furtiveness, their shadow of alert and hunted watching. For men came to Righa quietly, by devious ways, and dwelt in seclusion and departed without ostentation. And their eyes were always wary.

The girl's gaze flicked by them and went on. If they stared after her down the street she did not seem to know, or greatly to care. She paced unhurriedly on over the cobbles.

Ahead of her a broad, low door opened to a burst of noise and music, and warm light streamed briefly out into the gray day as a man stepped over the sill and swung the door shut behind him. Sidelong she watched the man as he belted his heavy coat of brown pole-deer hide and stepped briskly out into the street. He was tall, brown as leather, hard-featured under the pole-deer cap pulled low over his eyes. They were startling, those eyes, cold and steady, icily calm. Indefinably he was of Earth. His scarred dark face had a faintly piratical look, and he was wolfishly lean in his spaceman's leather as he walked lightly down the Lakklan, turning up the deer-hide collar about his ears with one hand. The other, his right, was hidden in the pocket of his coat.

The woman swerved when she saw him. He watched her subtly swaying approach without a flicker of expression on his face. But when she laid a milkily white hand upon his arm he gave a queer little start, involuntarily, like a shiver quickly suppressed. A ripple of annoyance crossed his face briefly and was gone, as if the muscular start had embarrassed him. He turned upon her an absolutely expressionless stare and waited.

"Who are you?" cooed a throatily velvet voice from the depths of the hood.

"Northwest Smith." He said it crisply, and his lips snapped shut again. He moved a little away from her, for her hand still lay upon his right arm, and his right hand was still hidden in the coat pocket. He moved far enough to free his arm, and stood waiting.

"Will you come with me?" Her voice throbbed like a pigeon's from the shadow of her hood.

For a quick instant his pale eyes appraised her, as caution and curiosity warred within him. Smith was a wary man, very wise in the dangers of the spaceways life. Not for a moment did he mistake her meaning. Here was no ordinary woman of the streets. A woman robed in snow-cat furs had no need to accost casual strangers along the Lakklan.

"What do you want?" he demanded. His voice was deep and harsh, and the words fairly clicked with a biting brevity.

"Come," she cooed, moving nearer again and slipping one hand inside his arm. "I will tell you that in my own house. It is so cold here."

SMITH allowed himself to be pulled along down the Lakklan, too puzzled and surprized to resist. That simple act of hers had amazed him out of all proportion to its simplicity. He was revising his judgment of her as he walked along over the snow-dusted cobbles at her side. For by that richly throaty voice that throbbed as colorfully as a dove's, and by the milky whiteness of her hand on his arm, and by the subtle swaying of her walk, he had been sure, quite sure, that she came from Venus. No other planet breeds such beauty, no other women are born with the instinct of seduction in their very bones. And he had thought, dimly, that he recognized her voice.

But no, if she were Venus-bred, and the woman he half suspected her of being, she would never have slid her arm through his with that little intimate gesture or striven to override his hesitation with the sheer strength of her own charm. His one small motion away from her hand on his arm would have warned a true Venusian not to attempt further intimacy. She would have known by the look in his still eyes, by the wolfish, scarred face, tight-mouthed, that his weakness did not lie along the lines she was mistress of. And if she were the woman he suspected, all this was doubly sure. No, she could not be Venus-bred, nor the woman her voice so recalled to him.

Because of this he allowed her to lead him down the Lakklan. Not often did he permit curiosity to override his native caution, or he would never have come unscathed through the stormy years that lay behind him. But there was something so subtly queer about this woman, so contradictory to his preconceived opinions. Very vital to Smith were his own quick appraisements, and when one went all awry from the lines he intuitively expected, he felt compelled to learn why. He went on at her side, shortening his strides to the gliding gait of the woman on his arm. He did not like the contact of her hand, although he could not have said why.

No further words passed between them until they had reached a low stone building ten minutes' walk on down the Lakklan. She rapped on the heavy door with a quick, measured beat, and it swung open upon dimness. Her bare white hand in the crook of Smith's arm pulled him inside.

A gliding servant took his coat and fur cap. Without ostentation, as he removed the coat he slipped out the gun which had lain in his right-hand pocket and upon which his hand had rested all the while he was in the street. He tucked it inside his leather jacket and followed the still cloaked woman down a short hallway and through a low arch under which he had to stoop his head.

The room they entered was immemorially ancient, changelessly Martian. Upon the dark stone floor, polished by the feet of countless generations, lay the furs of saltland beasts and the thick-pelted animals of the pole. The stone walls were

incised with those inevitable, mysterious symbols which have become nothing more than queer designs now, though a million years ago they bore deep significance. No Martian house, old or new, lacks them, and no living Martian knows their meaning.

Remotely they must be bound up with the queer, cold darkness of that strange religion which once ruled Mars and which dwells still in the heart of every true Martian, though its shrines are secret now and its priests discredited. Perhaps if one could read those symbols they would tell the name of the cold god whom Mars worships still, in its heart of hearts, yet whose name is never spoken.

The whole room was fragrant and a little mysterious with the aromatic fumes of the braziers set at intervals about the irregularly shaped room, and the low ceiling pressed the perfume down so that it hung in smoky layers in the sweet, heavy air.

"BE SEATED," murmured the woman from the depths of her hood.

Smith glanced about in distaste. The room was furnished in the luxuriant Martian style so at odds with the harsh characteristics of the Martian people. He selected the least voluptuous-looking of the couches and sat down, regarding the woman obliquely as he did so.

She had turned a little away from him now and was slowly unfastening her furs. Then in one slow, graceful motion she flung back the cloak.

Smith caught his breath involuntarily, and a little shiver rippled over him, like that queer shock which had shaken his usually iron poise in the street. He could not be certain whether it were admiration or distaste he felt more strongly. And this despite her breath-taking beauty. Frankly he stared.

Yes, she was Venusian. Nowhere save upon that sunless, mist-drenched planet are such milk-white women bred. Voluptuously slim she was, in the paradoxical Venusian way, and the sweet, firm curves of her under velvet were more eloquent than a love-song. Her deeply crimson robe swathed her close in the traditional Venusian way, leaving one arm and rose-white shoulder bare and slit so that at every other step her milky thigh gleamed through. Heavy lids veiled her eyes from him as she turned. Unmistakably, exquisitely, she was Venusian, and from head to foot so lovely that despite himself Smith's pulses quickened.

He bent forward, eyes eager upon her face. It was flawlessly lovely, the long eyes subtly tilted, the planes of her cheekbones and the set of her chin eloquent of the beauty which dwelt in the very bones beneath her sweet white flesh, so that even her skull must be lovely. And with an odd little catch in his breath, Smith admitted to himself that she was indeed the woman he had guessed. He had not mistaken the throbbing richness of her voice. But—he looked closer, and wondered if he really did catch some hint of—wrongness—in that delicately tinted face, in the oddly averted eyes. For a moment his mind ran backward, remembering.

Judai of Venus had been the toast of three planets a few years past. Her heart-twisting beauty, her voice that throbbed like a dove's, the glowing charm of her had captured the hearts of every audience that heard her sing. Even the far outposts of civilization knew her. That colorful, throaty voice had sounded upon Jupiter's moons and sent the cadences of *Starless Night* ringing over the bare rocks of asteroids and through the darkness of space.

And then she vanished. Men wondered awhile, and there were searches

and considerable scandal, but no one saw her again. All that was long past now. No one sang *Starless Night* any more, and it was the Earth-born Rose Robertson's voice which rang through the solar system in lilting praise of *The Green Hills of Earth.* Judai was years forgotten.

Smith knew her in the first glimpse he had of that high-cheeked, rose-tinted face. He had felt before he saw her that surely no two women of the same generation could speak in a voice so richly colored, so throbbingly sweet. And yet there was a hint of something alien in those gorgeously rich tones; something indefinably wrong in her unforgettable face; something that sent a little shock of distaste through him in the first glimpse he had of her beauty.

Yes, his ears and his eyes told him that she was Judai, but that infallible animal instinct which had saved him so often in such subtly warning ways told him just as surely that she was not—could not be. Judai, of all women, to make such un-Venusian errors of intuition! Feeling a little dizzy, he sat back and waited.

SHE glided across the floor to his side. The subtly provocative sway of her body as she moved was innately Venusian, but she sank to the couch beside him and allowed her body to touch his in a brushing contact that sent a little thrill through him involuntarily, though he moved away. No, Judai would never have done that. She would have known better.

"You know me—yes?" she queried, richly murmurous.

"We haven't met before," he said non-committally.

"But you know Judai. You remember. I saw it in your eyes. You must keep my secret, Northwest Smith. Can I trust you?"

"That—depends." His voice was dry.

"I left, that night in New York, because something called which was stronger than I. No, it was not love. It was stronger than love, Northwest Smith. I could not resist it."

There was a subtle amusement in her voice, as if she told some secret jest that had meaning to none but her. Smith moved a little farther from her on the couch.

"I have been searching a long while," she went on in her low, rich voice, "for such a man as you—a man who can be entrusted with a dangerous task." She paused.

"What is it?"

"There is a man in Righa who has something I very much want. He lives on the Lakklan by that drinking-house they call The Spaceman's Rest."

Again she paused. Smith knew the place well, a dark, low-roofed den where the shadier and more scrupulously wary transients in Righa gathered. For The Spaceman's Rest was owned by a grim-jawed, leathery old drylander named Mhici, who was rumored to have great influence with the powers in Righa; so that a drink in The Spaceman's Rest was safely taken, without danger of interruption. He knew old Mhici well. He turned a mildly inquiring eye upon Judai, waiting for her to go on.

Her own eyes were lowered, but she seemed to feel his gaze, for she took up her story again instantly, without lifting her lashes.

"The man's name I do not know, but he is of Mars, from the canal-countries, and his face is deeply scarred across both cheeks. He hides what I want in a little ivory box of drylander carving. If you can bring that to me you may name your own reward."

Smith's pale eyes turned again, reluctantly, to the woman beside him. He

wondered briefly why he disliked even to look at her, for she seemed lovelier each time his gaze rested upon that exquisitely tinted face. He saw that her eyes were still lowered, the feathery lashes brushing her cheeks. She nodded without looking up as he echoed,

"Any price I ask?"

"Money or jewels or—what you will."

"Ten thousand gold dollars to my name in the Great Bank at Lakkjourna, confirmed by radio-vision when I hand you the box."

If he expected a flicker of displeasure to cross her face at his matter-of-factness, he was disappointed. She rose in one long gliding motion and stood quietly before him. Smoothly, without lifting her eyes, she said,

"It is agreed, then. I will see you here tomorrow at this hour."

Her voice dropped with a note of finality and dismissal. Smith glanced up into her face, and at what he saw there started to his feet in an involuntary motion, staring undisguisedly. She was standing quite still, with downcast eyes, and all animation and allure were draining away from her face. Uncomprehending, he watched humanity fading as if some glowing inward tide ebbed away, leaving a husk of sweet, inanimate flesh where the radiant Judai had stood a moment before.

An unpleasant little coldness rippled down his back as he watched. Uncertainly he glanced toward the door, feeling more strongly than ever that inexplicable revulsion against some inner alienness he could not understand. As he hesitated, "Go, go!" came in an impatient voice from between her scarcely moving lips. And in almost ludicrous haste he made for the door. His last glance as it swung to of its own weight behind him revealed Judai standing motionless where he had left her, a still figure silhouetted white and scarlet against the immemorial pattern of the wall beyond. And he had a curious impression that a thin gray fog veiled her body in a slowly spreading nimbus that was inexplicably unpleasant.

DUSK was falling as he came out into the street again. A shadowy servant had given him his coat, and Smith departed so quickly that he was still struggling into the sleeves as he stepped out under the low arch of the door and drew a deep breath of the keen, icy air in conscious relief. He could not have explained, even to himself, the odd revulsion which Judai and her house had roused in him, but he was very glad to be free of them both and out in the open street again.

He shrugged himself deep into the warm fur coat and set off with long strides down the Lakklan. He was headed for The Spaceman's Rest. Old Mhici, if Smith found him in the right mood and approached him through the proper devious channels, might have information to give about the lovely lost singer and her strange house—and her credit at the Great Bank of Lakkjourna. Smith had small reason to doubt her wealth, but he took no needless chances.

The Spaceman's Rest was crowded. Smith made his way through the maze of tables toward the long bar at the end of the room, threading the crowd of hard-faced men whose wide diversity of races seemed to make little difference in the curious similarity of expression which dwelt upon every face. They were quiet and watchful-eyed and wore the indefinable air of those who live by their wits and their guns. The low-roofed place was thick with a pungent haze from the *nuari* which nearly all were smoking, and that in itself was evidence that in

Mhici's place they considered themselves secure, for *nuari* is mildly opiate.

Old Mhici himself came forward to the voiceless summoning in Smith's single pale-eyed glance as it met his in the crowd about the bar. The Earthman ordered red *segir*-whisky, but he did not drink it immediately.

"I know no one here," he observed in the drylander idiom, which was a flagrant misstatement, but heavy with meaning. For the hospitable old saltlands custom demands that the proprietor share a drink with any stranger who comes into his bar. It is a relic from the days when strangers were rare in the saltlands, and is very seldom recalled in populous cities like Righa, but Mhici understood. He said nothing, but he took the black Venusian bottle of *segir* by the neck and motioned Smith toward a corner table that stood empty.

When they were settled there and Mhici had poured himself a drink, Smith took one gulp of the red whisky and hummed the opening bars of *Starless Night,* watching the old drylander's pointed, leathery features. One of Mhici's eyebrows went up, which was the equivalent of a start of surprize in another man.

"Starless nights," he observed, "are full of danger, Smith."

"And of pleasure sometimes, eh?"

"Ur-r! Not this one."

"Oh?"

"No. And where I do not understand, I keep away."

"You're puzzled too, eh?"

"Deeply. What happened?"

Smith told him briefly. He knew that it is proverbial never to trust a drylander, but he felt that old Mhici was the exception. And by the old man's willingness to come to the point with a minimum of fencing and circumlocution he knew that he must be very perturbed by Judai's presence in Righa. Old Mhici missed little, and if he was puzzled by her presence Smith felt that his own queer reactions to the Venusian beauty had not been unjustified.

"I know the box she means," Mhici told him when he had finished. "There's the man, over there by the wall. See?"

Under his brows Smith studied a lean, tall canal-dweller with a deeply scarred face and an air of restless uneasiness. He was drinking some poisonously green concoction and smoking *nuari* so heavily that the clouds of it veiled his face. Smith grunted contemptuously.

"If the box is valuable he's not putting himself into any shape to guard it," he said. "He'll be dead asleep in half an hour if he keeps that up."

"Look again," murmured Mhici. And Smith, wondering a little at the dryness of the old man's voice, turned his head and studied the canal-dweller more carefully.

This time he saw what had escaped him before. The man was frightened, so frightened that the *nuari* pouring in and out of his lungs was having little effect. His restless eyes were hot with anxiety, and he had maneuvered his back to the wall so that he could command the whole room as he drank. That in itself, here in Mhici's place, was flagrant. Mhici's iron fist and ready gun had established order in The Spaceman's Rest long ago, and no man in years had dared break it. Mhici commanded not only physical but also moral respect, for his influence with the powers of Righa was exerted not only to furnish immunity to his guests but also to punish peace-breakers. The Spaceman's Rest was sanctuary. No, for a man to sit with his back to the wall here bespoke terror of something more deadly than guns.

"They're following him, you know," Mhici murmured over the rim of his glass. "He stole that box somewhere

along the canals, and now he's afraid of his shadow. I don't know what's in the box, but its damn' valuable to someone and they're out to get it at any cost. Do you still want to relieve him of it?"

SMITH squinted at the drylander through narrowed eyes. How old Mhici learned the secrets he knew, no one could guess, but he had never been caught in error. And Smith had little desire to call down upon himself the enmity of whatever perils it was which kindled the fear of death in the canal-dweller's eyes. Yet curiosity rode him still. The puzzle of Judai was a tantalizing mystery which he felt he must solve.

"Yes," he said slowly. "I've got to know."

"I'll get you the box," said Mhici suddenly. "I know where he hides it, and there's a way between here and the house next door that will let me at it in five minutes. Wait here."

"No," said Smith quickly. "That's not fair to you. I'll get it."

Mhici's wide mouth curved.

"I'm in little danger," he said. "Here in Righa no one would dare—and besides, that way is secret. Wait."

Smith shrugged. After all, Mhici knew how to take care of himself. He sat there gulping down *segir* as he waited, and watching the canal-dweller across the room. Terror played in changing patterns across the scarred face.

When Mhici reappeared he carried a small wooden crate labeled conspicuously in Venusian characters. Smith translated, "Six Pints Segir, Vanda Distilleries, Ednes, Venus."

"It's in this," murmured Mhici, setting down the box. "You'd better stay here tonight. You know, the back room that opens on the alley."

"Thanks," said Smith in some embarrassment. He was wondering why the old drylander had taken such pains in his behalf. He had expected no more than a few words of warning. "I'll split the money, you know."

Mhici shook his head.

"I don't think you'll get it," he said candidly. "And I don't think she really wants the box. Not half so much as she wants you, anyhow. There were any number of men who could have got the box for her. And you remember how she said she'd been looking a long time for someone like yourself. No, it's the man she wants, I think. And I can't figure out why."

Smith wrinkled his brows and traced a design on the table-top in spilt *segir*.

"I've got to know," he said stubbornly.

"I've passed her in the street. I've felt that same revulsion, and I don't know why. I don't like this, Smith. But if you feel you have to go through with it, that's your affair. I'll help if I can. Let's drop it, eh? What are you doing tonight? I hear there's a new dancer at the Lakktal now."

Much later, in the shifting light of Mars' hurrying moons, Smith stumbled up the little alley behind The Spaceman's Rest and entered the door in the rear of the bar. His head was a bit light with much *segir*, and the music and the laughter and the sound of dancing feet in the Lakktal's halls made an echoing beat through his head. He undressed clumsily in the dark and stretched himself with a heavy sigh on the leather couch which is the Martian bed.

Just before sleep overtook him he found himself remembering Judai's queer little quirking smile when she said, "I left New York because something called—stronger than love. . . ." And he thought drowsily, "What is stronger than love? . . ." The answer came to him just as he sank into oblivion. "Death."

W. T.—3

SMITH slept late the next day. The tritime steel watch on his wrist pointed to Martian noon when old Mhici himself pushed open the door and carried in a tray of breakfast.

"There's been excitement this morning," he observed as he set down his burden.

Smith sat up and stretched luxuriously. "What?"

"The canal man shot himself."

Smith's pale eyes sought out the case labeled "Six Pints Segir" where it stood in the corner of the room. His brows went up in surprize.

"Is it so valuable as that?" he murmured. "Let's look at it."

Mhici shot the bolts on the two doors as Smith rose from the leather couch and dragged the box into the center of the floor. He pried up the thin boards that Mhici had nailed down the night before over the twice-stolen box, and pulled out an object wrapped in brown canvas. With the old drylander bending over his shoulder he unwound the wrappings. For a full minute thereafter he squatted on his heels staring in perplexity at the thing in his hands. It was not large, this little ivory box, perhaps ten inches by four, and four deep. Its intricate drylander carving struck him as remotely familiar, but he had been staring at it for several seconds before it dawned upon him where he had seen those odd spirals and queer twisted characters before. Then he remembered. No wonder they looked familiar, for they had stared down upon him bafflingly from the walls of countless Martian dwellings. He lifted his eyes and saw a band of them circling the walls above him now. But they were large, and these on the box intricately tiny, so that at first glance they looked like the merest waving lines incised delicately all over the box's surface.

Not until then, following those crawling lines, did he see that the box had no opening. To all appearances it was not a box at all, but a block of carved ivory. He shook it, and something within shifted slightly, as if it were packed in loose wrappings. But there was no opening anywhere. He turned it over and over, peering and prying, but to no avail. Finally he shrugged and wrapped the canvas back about the enigma.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

Mhici shook his head.

"Great Shar alone can tell," he murmured half in derision, for Shar is the Venusian god, a friendly deity whose name rises constantly to the lips of the Hot Planet's dwellers. The god whom Mars worships, openly or in secret, is never named aloud.

They discussed the puzzle of it off and on the rest of the afternoon. Smith spent the hours restlessly, for he dared not smoke *nuari* nor drink much, with the interview so close ahead. When the shadows were lengthening along the Lakklan he got into his deerhide coat again and tucked the ivory box into an inner pocket. It was bulky, but not betrayingly so. And he made sure his flamegun was charged and ready.

In the late afternoon sun that sparkled blindingly upon the snow crystals blowing along the wind, he went down the Lakklan again with his right hand in his pocket and his eyes raking the street warily under the shadow of his cap. Evidently the pursuers of that box had not traced it, for he was not followed.

JUDAI's house squatted dark and low at the edge of the Lakklan. Smith fought down a rising revulsion as he lifted his hand to knock, but the door swung open before his knuckles had touched the panel. That same shadowy servant beckoned him in. This time he did not put his gun away when he shifted it

from his coat pocket. He took the canvas-wrapped box in one hand and the flame-pistol in the other, and the servant opened the door he had passed last night upon the room where Judai was waiting.

She stood exactly as he had left her in the center of the floor, white and scarlet against the queer traceries on the wall beyond. He had the curious notion that she had not stirred since he left her last night. She moved a little sluggishly as she turned her head and saw him, but it was a lethargy which she quickly overcame. She motioned him toward the divan, taking her seat at his side with the flowing, feline ease of every true Venusian. And as before, he shrank involuntarily from the contact of that fragrant, velvet-sheathed body, with an inner revulsion he could not understand.

She said nothing, but she held out her two hands cupped up in entreaty, and she did not lift her eyes to his face as she did so. He laid the box in her upturned palms. At that moment for the first time it occurred to him that not once had he met her eyes. She had never lifted those veiling lashes and looked into his. Wondering, he watched.

She was unwrapping the canvas with quick, delicate motions of her pink-stained fingers. When the box lay bare in her hands she sat quite motionless for a while, her lowered eyes fixed upon the carven block of the thing which had cost at least one life. And her quiet was unnatural, trance-like. He thought she must have ceased to breathe. Not a lash fluttered, not a pulse stirred in her round white wrists as she held the little symbol-traced box up. There was something indescribably horrid in her quiet as she sat and stared, all her being centered in one vast, still concentration upon the ivory box.

Then he heard such a deep breath rush out through her nostrils that it might have been life itself escaping, a breath that thinned into a high, shuddering hum like the whine of wind through wires. It was not a sound that any human creature could make.

Without realizing that he had moved, Smith leaped. Of their own volition his muscles tensed into a spring of animal terror away from that high-whining thing on the couch. He found himself half crouched a dozen paces away, his gun steady in a lifted hand and his hair stiffening at the roots as he faced her. For by the thin, high, shuddering noise he knew surely that she was not human.

For a long instant he crouched there, taut, feeling his scalp crawl with a prickling terror as his pale eyes searched for some reason in this madness which had come over them both. She still sat rigid, with lowered eyes, but though she had not stirred, something told him unerringly that his first instinct had been right, his first intuitive flinching from her hand on his arm—she was not human. Warm white flesh and fragrant hair and subtle, curving roundness of her under velvet, all this was camouflage to conceal—to conceal—he could not guess what, but he knew that loveliness for a lie, and all down his back the nerves tingled with man's involuntary shudder from the unknown.

She rose. Cradling the ivory box against the sweet high curve of her bosom, she moved slowly forward, her lashes making two dim crescents on her exquisitely tinted cheeks. He had never seen her lovelier, or more hideously repulsive. For in some obscure part of his brain he knew that the humanity which she had clutched like a cloak about her was being dropped. In another instant . . .

She paused before him, very near, so near that the muzzle of his half-forgotten gun was pressed against the velvet that

sheathed her body, and the fragrance of her rose in a vague cloud to his nostrils. For one tense instant they stood so, she with lowered lashes, cradling her ivory box, he rigid with prickling revulsion, gun nosing her side, pale eyes set in a narrow-lidded stare as he waited shudderingly for what must come next. In the split second before her eyelids rose, he wanted overwhelmingly to fling up a hand and shut out the sight of what lay behind them, to run blindly out of the room and out of the house and never stop until the doors of The Spaceman's Rest closed shelteringly upon him. He could not stir. Caught in a frozen trance, he stared. The lashes fluttered. Slowly, very slowly, her lids rose.

The cold shock that jolted him into incredulity then made every detail of the picture so clear that he was never to forget, no matter how hard he tried, the vividness of that first glimpse into Judai's eyes. Yet for a full minute he did not realize what he saw. It was too incredible for the brain to grasp. With thickly beating heart he stood rigid, staring into the weird face turned to his.

From under those deep-curved lashes looked out no such luminous depths of darkness as he had expected. There were no eyes behind Judai's creamy lids. Instead he was looking into two lash-fringed, almond-shaped pits of gray smoke, smoke that seethed and shifted and boiled within itself, unresting as smoke from the fires of hell. He knew then that there dwelt in the curved and milk-white body which had been Judai's a thing more evil than any devil hell's fires ever spawned. How it came into that body he never knew, but he did know that the real Judai was gone. Looking into that restlessly seething smoky blindness, he was sure of that, and revulsion surged through him as he strained at his own body for the will to blast this hell-tenanted beauty into nothingness, and could not stir. Helpless in the frozen grip of his own horror, he watched.

She—it—stood straight before him, staring blankly. And he was aware of a slow seepage from the gray pits of the eyes. Smoke was curling out into the room in delicate whirls and plumes. Sickness came over him as he realized it, and an extravagant terror, for it was not the sweet-smelling, clean smoke of fire. There was no physically perceptible odor to it, but from the unspeakably evil stench his very soul shuddered away. He could smell evil, taste it, feel it, perceive it with more senses than he knew he possessed, despite the intangibility of the swirling stuff that billowed now in deepening waves from under the lash-fringed lids that once had been Judai's. Once before he had been dimly aware of this, when he had looked back as he left, the night before, to see that vague gray veiling a woman's milk-whiteness in obscurity that was somehow—unpleasant. Even that remote hinting at what he saw now in full strength had been enough to send a warning shudder through him. But now—now it billowed about him in thickening deeps through which he could scarcely make out the pale shape of the figure before him, and the grayness was seeping through his body and mind and soul with a touch more dreadful than the touch of every ugly thing in creation. It was not tangible, but it was slimier and more unclean than anything he could have named. Not upon his flesh but upon his soul that wet slime crawled.

Dimly through the swirl of it he saw the lips of Judai's body move. A ghost of a voice fluted into the grayness, a sweet, rich, throbbing thread of sound. So lovely had been Judai's voice that even the horror which stirred it now into speech could not evoke discords from a

throat that had never uttered any sound but music.

"I am ready to take you now, Northwest Smith. The time has come to discard this body and these ways of seduction and put on a man's strength and straightforwardness, so that I may complete what I came to do. I shall not need it long, but your force and vitality I must have before I surrender them up to mighty ———. And then I may go forth in my true form to bring the worlds under great ———'s reign."

Smith blinked. There had been a gap in her words where he should have heard a name, but it had not been a gap of silence. Her lips had moved, though no sound came forth, and the air shook with a wordless cadence so deeply stirring that he felt involuntary awe—if it were possible to feel awe at the utterance of a word without sound.

That sweetly murmurous voice was whispering through the fog that had thickened now until he could scarcely see the outlines of the figure before him.

"I have waited so long for you, Northwest Smith — for a man with a body and a brain like yours, to serve my needs. I take you now, in great ———'s name. In that name, I bid you surrender your body. Go!"

The last word cracked through the mist, and abruptly blindness swept over him. His feet no longer pressed the floor. He was wallowing in a fog of such revolting horror that his very soul writhed within him for escape. Slimily the gray stuff seeped through his being, crawling and sliding and oozing, and the touch of it upon his brain was a formless madness, so that the soul which shuddered from such indescribable dreadfulness would have fled into hell itself to escape.

Dimly he knew what was happening. His body was being made untenable to force his consciousness to leave it. And knowing this, realizing what its portent was, yet he found himself struggling desperately for release. The crawling ooze was a slime upon his very soul. There could be no alternative so frightful as this sickening reality. Madness was in the frightened writhing of self to escape the horror that enfolded him. Frantically he fought for release.

It came suddenly. He was aware of a distinct snapping, as of something tangible, and then freedom. On the instant those gray, crawling swaths of revulsion ceased to be. He floated free and light and impalpable in a void without light or dark, conscious of nothing but the blessed release from torment.

GRADUALLY realization came back to him. He had no form or substance now, but he was aware. And he knew that he must seek his body again; how, he did not know, but the thought of it was a poignant longing, and his whole intangible being so concentrated upon that thought that in a moment or two the room he had left began to take shape about him, and his own tall figure swam hazily through the veiling fog. With a mighty effort he bent his thoughts upon that figure, and at last began to understand what was taking place.

He could see now with clear, unhampered vision around all points of the compass at once. Floating in nothingness, he watched the room. It was a little difficult at first to see any one thing, for he no longer had the focus of eyes to help him and the room was a wide panorama without center. But after a while he learned the trick of concentration, and saw clearly for the first time his own relinquished self, broad and tall and leather-brown, standing rigid in the midst of a sliding fog that curled about it in thick, slimy glidings which brought back memories of sickening vividness. At the feet

of that brown, fog-veiled shape lay the body of Judai. Exquisitely graceful, it stretched in a glimmer of white and scarlet across the dark floor. He knew she was dead now. The breath of alien life which had been infused into her was withdrawn. Death's curious flatness was eloquent in the piteously lovely body rounding under the velvet robe. The Thing was done with her.

He turned his attention again to his own body. That horribly alive fog had thickened still more, into heavy, half-palpable robes of sliding slime that crawled unceasingly over and around the tall figure. But it was disappearing. It was seeping slowly, remorselessly, into the flesh he had vacated. Now it was more than half gone, and into the frozen body a semblance of life was stealing. He watched while the last of the gray stuff which was the Thing took possession of his lost self, waking it into a cold and alien life. He saw it seize upon the nerves and muscles he had trained, so that its first motion was the familiar quick gesture to slip the flame-gun into its holster under his arm. He saw his own broad shoulders shrug unconsciously to be sure the strap was in place. He watched himself crossing the room with the long, light steps that had once been his. He saw his own hands pick up the ivory box from the slim, pink-stained fingers of Judai.

Not until then did he realize that thoughts were open to his reading now, as clearly as words had been before. The only thoughts in the room had been the alien ones of the Thing, and until this moment they had not taken forms human enough to have meaning to him. But now he began to understand many things, and the strangeness of them whirled through his consciousness in half-incomprehensible patterns.

Then abruptly a name flashed through those thoughts, and the power of it struck him with such force that for an instant his hold upon the scene slipped and he whirled back into that void again where neither light nor darkness dwelt. As he fought his way back into the room his unbodied mind was struggling to put together the pieces of newly acquired knowledge, in which that name flamed like a beacon, the center and focus for all the patterns of the knowledge.

It was the name his ears had not been able to hear when Judai's lips spoke it. He knew now that though human lips could frame its syllables, no brain that was wholly human could send the impulses for that framing; so that it could never be spoken by a sane man, nor heard or understood by him. Even so, the wordless vibrations of it had eddied through his brain in waves of awe. And now, when its unveiled force struck full upon his unprotected consciousness, the mightiness of that name was enough to send him reeling all out of focus and control.

For it was the name of a Thing so powerful that even in his unreality he shuddered at the thought; a thing whose full might no flesh-veiled consciousness could grasp. Only in his disembodied awareness could he realize it, and he turned his mind away from that awful name even as he delved deeper into the alien thoughts that flashed before him from the creature which wore his semblance.

He knew now why the Thing had come. He knew the purpose of that which bore the name. And he knew why the men of Mars never spoke their cold god's title. They could not. It was not a name human brains could grasp or human lips utter without compulsion from Outside. Slowly the origins of that curious religion took shape in his mind.

The name had dwelt like some vast,

brooding shadow among the earliest ancestors of Martian men, millions upon millions of years ago. It had come from its lair Outside, and dwelt dreadfully among mankind, sucking life from its worshippers and reigning with such awe and terror that even now, after countless eons had gone by, though its very existence was forgotten, that terror and awe lived yet in the minds of these remote descendants.

Nor was the name wholly gone, even now. It had withdrawn, for reasons too vast for comprehension. But it had left behind it shrines, and each of them was a little doorway into that presence; so that the priests who tended them furnished tribute. Sometimes they were possessed by the power of their god, and spoke the name which their devotees could not hear, yet whose awful cadences were a storm of power about them. And this was the origin of that strange, dark religion which upon Mars has been discredited for so long, though it has never died in the hearts of men.

Smith understood now that the Thing which dwelt in his body was a messenger from Outside, although he could never quite grasp in what capacity. It might have been a part of that vast composite power which bore the name. He never knew. Its thoughts when they wandered in that direction were too alien to carry any meaning into his mind. When it even turned those thoughts backward toward its origin, and the might of the name flashed through them, Smith quickly learned to shrink within himself, withdrawing his consciousness until that thought had passed. It was like gazing through an opened door into the furnaces of hell.

He watched himself turn the box slowly over between his hands, while his own pale eyes searched its surface. Or were they his eyes? Did there dwell now under his own lids the grayness of the Thing? He could not be sure, for he could not bring himself to concentrate directly upon that foggy dweller within his body. Its touch was so alien, so repulsive.

Now his hands had found some hidden opening. He could not tell exactly what happened, but suddenly he saw himself wrenching at the ivory box, with a queer, twisting motion, and the two halves of it fell apart along an uneven line of cleavage. Out of it a thick mist rose, a heavy, semi-tangible stuff in which the hands of his body groped as if through folds of cloth.

SLUGGISHLY the mist spilled floorward, while from the box he saw himself drawing a thing which cleared away a little of the mystery that shrouded so much of what had happened. For he recognized the curious symbol that had lain in the mist-filled box. It was wrought from a substance which has no duplicate anywhere on the three worlds, a translucent metal through whose depths a smoky dimness was diffused in vague curls and plumes. And its shape was the duplicate of a symbol repeated often in the wall-carvings of every Martian house. Smith had heard whispers of this talisman passed from mouth to mouth in the secrecy of space-pirates' rendezvous. For its very existence was a secret to all save those rovers of the spaceways from whom nothing is wholly hidden.

The symbol, so those whispers said, was a talisman from the old religion, used in the worship of the nameless god in the ages before discredit had forced the worship into secrecy—a thing of terrible power had any living man known how to use it. It was said to be kept in inviolable hiding somewhere in one of the canal cities. He understood now in what terror the canal-dweller with the

scarred face must have gone, knew why he had not dared face the consequences of his own theft. The priests of the name were held in the more terror for the darkness of their calling.

The story behind that theft he was never to know. It was enough that the Thing had the priceless talisman now. Through his own efforts that immemorial symbol had fallen into the only hands which would know how to wield it: paradoxically, the hands that had once been his. Helplessly he watched.

His own fingers lifted it up familiarly. It was not more than twelve inches long, a thing of subtle curves and arcs. Suddenly he knew what the symbol meant. From the cloudy alienness of the mind which dwelt where his mind had dwelt, he drew the certainty that the talisman had been wrought into the shape of the written name: that unspeakable word, crystallized into nameless metal. The Thing handled it with a sort of unhuman awe.

He watched himself turning slowly round as if in an effort to orient his body with some unknown point at a measureless distance. His hand, holding the symbol, rose high. The room was full of a tense solemnity, an unbreathing hush, as if some long-awaited moment of tremendous awe and portent had been reached at last. Slowly, with stiff steps, his lost body paced toward the eastern wall, the symbol held rigidly before it.

At that tracery-incised wall it stopped, and with a gesture full of ritualistic slowness lifted the talisman and set its curved apex against an identical symbol on the wall, the carven counterpart of the name. And from that point it drew the talisman down and crosswise as if it were painting an unseen curve on the wall. As he watched that moving apex Smith realized what was happening. Invisibly, with the metal-wrought talisman following lines in the symbols on the wall, it was tracing that name. And the ritual was invested with a depth of power and a nameless portent that sent sudden terror thrilling through him. What was the meaning of it?

Cold with a bodiless chill of foreboding, he watched the rite to its close. The talisman sketched the last lines of that pattern upon the wall, completely enclosing a space that covered perhaps six square feet of tracery. And then his own tall body flourished the metal symbol like one who welcomes a caller through an opened door, and dropped to its knees before the outlined pattern.

For a minute—for two minutes—nothing happened. Then, watching the wall, Smith thought he could discern the shape of the symbol that had been traced. Somehow it was becoming clear among the painted characters. Somehow a grayness was spreading within the outlines he had watched his own hands trace, a fogginess that strengthened and grew clearer and clearer, until he could no longer make out the traceries enclosed within its boundaries, and a great, misty symbol stood out vividly across the wall.

He did not understand for a moment. He watched the grayness take on density and grow stronger with each passing moment, but he did not understand until a long curl of fog drifted lazily out into the room, and the grayness began to spill over its own edges and eddy and billow as if that wall were afire. And from very far away, over measureless voids, he caught the first faint impact of a power so great that he knew in one flash the full horror of what he watched.

The name, traced upon that wall with its own metal counterpart, had opened a doorway for the Thing which bore the name to enter. It was coming back to the world it had left millions of years ago.

It was oozing through the opened door, and nothing he could do would stop it.

He was a bodiless awareness drifting through voids that held neither light nor dark—he was a nothingness, and he must watch his own body bring down the destruction of the worlds he had dwelt in without any strength to oppose a feather's weight of resistance.

Despairingly he watched a long plume of the dawning terror brush his body's bent head. At the contact that body rose stiffly, as if in answer to a command, and backed slowly across the room to where the body of Judai lay sprawled upon the floor. It stooped like an automaton and lifted her in its arms. It came forward again, walking mechanically, and laid her down under the billowing symbol that was a gateway into deeper depths than hell. The smoke wreathed downward hungrily, hiding the white and scarlet of her from view.

For an instant it writhed and boiled about the spot where she had been engulfed, and the impact of greater force struck in one mighty blow against Smith's consciousness. For across the measureless gulfs the power of the name was nearing. Whatever of energy it had absorbed from the body of Judai had brought it nearer with a long leap, so that now the might of it echoed round and round the symbol-walled room like the beat of drums. There was triumph in that beating. Remotely, in the recurrent waves of thunderous power, he understood at last the purpose of those symbols.

All this had been planned eons ago, when the Unnamable One departed from Mars. Perhaps the ages had been no more than a moment to its timeless might. But it had left with full meaning to return, and so had graven more deeply than time could erase on the minds of its worshippers the need for those symbols upon their walls. Only the need; not the reason. They were to make full access into this world possible again. The remote touch which its priests kept through their shrines to the Nameless One were like tiny windows, but here, hidden among the traceries, opened a mighty gateway through which all that measureless power could sweep irresistibly when the hour came. And it had come.

Dimly he caught a vision of triumph from the mind of the Thing which stood rigid in his body before the billowing wall, a vision of other worlds wherever the symbols were graven opening like doors for the great gray surges to come flooding through, a vision of worlds engulfed and seething in one unbroken blanket of gray that writhed and eddied and sucked avidly at the bodies and souls of men.

Smith's consciousness shuddered in the void where it drifted, raged against its own helplessness, watched in horror-struck fascination the surges of billowing gray that rolled slowly into the room. The body of Judai had wholly vanished now. And the long fog-fingers were groping blindly as if in search for other food. In a swimming horror he watched his own tall body stumble forward and sink to its knees under the plumes of ravenous gray.

Somehow the vivid despair of that moment was strong enough to do something which nothing that preceded it had accomplished. The prospect of the world's destruction had made him sick with a hopeless dread; but the thought of his own body offered up as a sacrifice to the flooding gray, leaving him to drift for eternity through voids, cracked like a whiplash against his consciousness in one flash of hot rebellion that jerked him all out of focus to the scene he watched. Violent revolt surged up in him against the power of the Thing and the awful force of that which bore the name.

How it happened he did not know, but suddenly he was no longer floating disembodied through nothingness. Suddenly he was bursting the bonds that parted him from reality. Suddenly he was violently back again into the world from which he had been thrust, fighting desperately to gain access once more into his body, struggling in panic terror to force an entry against the thick grayness of what dwelt there now. It was a nauseous and revolting struggle, so close to the slimy presence of the Thing, but he scarcely heeded its nearness in his frenzy to save the body that was his.

For the moment he was not striving for full possession, but he pushed and raged and fought to seize his own muscles and drag his body back from the billows that were rolling hungrily toward it. It was a more desperate struggle than any hand-to-hand combat, the struggle of two entities for a single body.

The Thing that opposed him was strong, and firmly entrenched in the nerve-centers and brain-cells that had been his, but he was fighting the more hotly for the familiarity of the field he sought to win. And slowly he won entrance. Perhaps it was because he was not striving at first for full possession. In its struggles to cling fast to what it held, the Thing could not oppose his subtle sliding in among the centers that controlled motion, and by jerky degrees he dragged his own body to its feet and backward, step by hotly contested step, away from the seething pattern that oozed upon the wall. Sick to the very soul with the closeness of the Thing, he fought.

He was struggling now to force it wholly out, and if he was not driving it away, at least he held his own. It could not dislodge him from the foothold he had won. There were flashes when he saw the room through his own eyes again, and felt the strength of his body like a warm garment about the nakedness of the self which strove for its possession, yet a body through which crawled and slid the dreadfulness of that sickening fog-fluid which was a slime upon his innermost soul.

But the Thing was strong. It had rooted its tendrils deep in the body he fought for, and would not let go. And through the room in recurrent thunders beat the might of the coming name, impatient, insistent, demanding sustenance that it might pass wholly through the gateway. Its long fog-fingers stretched clutchingly out into the room. And in Smith a faint hope was growing that it must have his body before it could come farther. If he could prevent that, perhaps all was not yet lost. If he could prevent it—but the Thing he struggled with was strong. . . .

Time had ceased to have meaning for him. In a dream of horror he wallowed amid the thick and sickening slime of his enemy, fighting for a more precious thing than his own life. He fought for death. For if he could not win his body, yet he knew he must enter it long enough to die somehow, by his own hand, cleanly; else he would drift through eternity in the void where neither light nor darkness dwelt. How long it went on he never knew. But in one of those moments when he had won a place in his own body again, and perceived with its senses, he heard the sound of an opening door.

With infinite effort he twisted his head around. Old Mhici stood in the opening, flame-gun in hand, blinking bewilderedly into the fog-dim room. There was a dawning terror in his eyes as he stared, a terror deep-rooted and age-old, heritage from those immemorial ancestors upon whose minds the name had been graven

too deeply for time to efface. Half comprehending, he stood in the presence of the god of his fathers, and Smith could see a paralyzing awe creeping slowly across his face. He could not have known from the sight of that fog-oozing wall what it was he looked upon, but an inner consciousness seemed to make clear to him that the thing which bore the name was a presence in the room. And it must have realized Mhici's presence, for about the walls in tremendous beats of command roared the thunderous echoes of that far-away might, ravenous to feed again upon man. Old Mhici's eyes glazed with obedience. He stumbled forward one mechanical step.

Something cracked in Smith's consciousness. If Mhici reached the wall, all his struggles would be for nothing. With that nourishment the name might enter. Well, at any rate he could save himself—perhaps. He must die before that happened. And with all the strength that was in him summoned up in one last despairing surge he crowded the Thing that dwelt with him momentarily out of control, and fell upon Mhici with clawed hands clutching for his throat.

Whether the old drylander understood or not, whether he could see in the pale eyes that had been his friend's the slow writhing of the Thing, Smith could not guess. He saw the horror and incredulity upon the leathery features of the Martian as he lunged, and then, in blessed relief, felt wiry fingers at his own neck. Yet he knew that Mhici was striving not to injure him, and he struggled in desperation to lash the old drylander into self-defensive fury. He struck and gouged and tore, and felt in overwhelming relief the old man's strong grip tighten at last about his neck.

He relaxed then in the oncoming oblivion of those releasing fingers.

From very far away a hoarse voice calling his name dragged Smith up through layer upon layer of cloudy nothingness. He opened heavy eyes and stared. Gradually old Mhici's anxious face swam into focus above him. *Segir* was burning in his mouth. He swallowed automatically, and the pain of his bruised throat as the fiery liquid went down roused him into full consciousness. He struggled to a sitting position, pressing one hand to his reeling head and blinking dazedly about.

He lay upon the dark stone floor where oblivion had overtaken him. The patterned walls looked down. His heart suddenly leaped into thick beating. He twisted round, seeking that wall which had oozed grayness through a door that opened upon Outside. And with such relief that he sank back against Mhici's shoulder in sudden weakness, he saw that the Unnamable One no longer billowed out into the room. Instead, that wall was a cracked and charred ruin down which long streams of half-melted rock were congealing. The room was pungent and choking with the odor of a flame-gun's blast.

He turned questioning eyes to Mhici, croaking something inarticulate in the depths of his swollen throat.

"I—I burnt it," said Mhici in a strange half-shame.

Smith jerked his head round again and stared at the ruined wall, a hot chagrin flooding over him. Of course, if the pattern were destroyed, that door would close through which the One which bore the name was entering. Somehow that had never occurred to him. Somehow he had wholly forgotten that a flame-gun was sheathed under his arm during all the long struggle he had held with the Thing co-dwelling in his body. He realized in a moment why. The awful power which in his bodiless state had thundered about

him from that infinity of might which bore the name was so measureless that the very thought of a flame-gun seemed too futile to dwell upon. But Mhici had not known. He had never felt that vast furnace-blast of force beating about him. And quite simply, with one flash of his ray-gun, he had closed the door to Outside.

His voice was beating insistently in Smith's ears, shaking with emotion and reaction, and cracking a little now and then like the voice of an old man. For the first time old Mhici was showing his age.

"What happened? What in your own God's name—no, don't tell me now. Don't try to talk. I—I—you can tell me later." And then rapidly, in disjointed sentences, as if he were talking to drown out the sound of his own thoughts, "Perhaps I can guess—never mind. Hope I haven't hurt you. You must have been crazy, Smith. Better now? After you—you—when I saw you on the floor, there was a—well, a fog, I guess—thick as slime, that came rolling up from you like—I can't say what. And suddenly I was mad. That awful gray, rolling out of the wall—I don't know what happened. First I knew I was blazing away into the depths of it, and then the wall beyond cracked and melted, and the whole fog mass was fading out. Don't know why. Don't know what happened then. I must have been—out—a little while myself. It's gone now. I don't know why, but it's gone. . . .

"Here, have some more *segir*."

Smith stared up at him unseeingly. A vague wonder was circling in his mind as to why the Thing that had tenanted his body surrendered. Perhaps Mhici had choked life out of that body, so that the Thing had to flee and his own consciousness could enter unopposed. Perhaps—he gave it up. He was too tired to think about it now. He was too tired to think at all. He sighed deeply and reached for the *segir* bottle.

The Dead-Alive Mummy

By SEABURY QUINN

An amazing and startling story about an ancient Egyptian mummy and a beautiful American girl—a tale of Jules de Grandin

SHE came walking slowly toward us past the rows of mummy-cases. Not tall, but very slim she was, sheathed in a low-cut evening gown of midnight velvet which set her creamy shoulders off in sharp relief. Her hair, blue-black and glossy, was stretched without a ripple to a knot behind her neck, and contrasted oddly with her eyes of peacock blue. There was contrast, too, between the small and slightly kestrel nose and the full and sensuous mouth which blossomed moist and brilliant-red against the unrouged pallor of her narrow face. One slender-fingered hand was toying with a rope of pearls, and as she stepped there was a glint of golden links beneath the gossamer silk encasing her left ankle. Clouded, but unconcealed, the jewel-red lacquer on her toenails shone through filmy stocking-tips exposed by toeless satin sandals.

"*Mon Dieu*, but she is vital as a flame!" de Grandin whispered. "Who is she, Friend Trowbridge?"

"Dolores Mendoza," I answered, "the sister of the man who gave this collection of Egyptiana to the Harkness Museum. Old Aaron Mendoza, her father, was fanatical about ancient Egypt, and was said to have the third finest collection in the world, ranking next after the British Museum and the *Musée des Antiques* at Cairo."

The little Frenchman nodded. "So we are here," he murmured.

We were, as he had said, there for that very reason.

Aaron Mendoza, son and grandson of our city's foremost merchants, had retired from commercial life at the relatively early age of sixty, turning active management of the Mendoza Department Store over to his son Carlos and devoting himself to Egyptology with an energy amounting to a passion. Honest in all his mercantile transactions with the rigid honesty of a Portuguese-Jewish family which traced its history unbroken past the days of the Crusades, he had not scrupled to resort to any practise which would further his ambition to acquire the finest private Egyptological collection in the world. Men noted for their learning, daring and "resourcefulness" had named what fees they wanted for their services to him, and one by one they brought to him the spoils of Egypt's sands and pyramids and hidden rock-tombs—bits of art-craft wrought in gold and silver, lapis-lazuli and celadon, things whose valuations sounded like the figures of a nation's load of debt, papyri setting forth in picture-writing secrets never dreamt by modern man, desiccated bodies of kings and priests and priestesses whose intrigues shaped the destiny of nations in the days when history was an infant in its swaddling bands.

One morning they found Aaron sitting on his bed, a vacuous grin disfiguring his handsome face, both feet thrust into one trouser-leg. He babbled like a baby when they spoke to him, and smiled at me with child-like glee when I tried to ask him how he felt. His strong, fine

"Catch her, my friend," he ordered. "She swoons!"

brain had softened to a mass of cheesy waste while he was sleeping, and within a week the helplessness of paresis had settled on him. In six months he was dead.

Scarcely had the period of formal mourning ended when Carlos Mendoza announced the gift of all his father's ancient treasures to the Harkness Museum. With antiques went a sum to build a wing for housing them and a fund for their maintenance. This evening the new wing was opened with due ceremony, and the city's notables were gathered for the rites of dedication. Somehow — possibly because I had brought him and his sister into the world and steered them through the mumps and chickenpox and other childish ills— Carlos had included me and de Grandin in the list of guests invited, and we had traversed miles of marbled corridors, viewing the exhibits with that awe which modern man displays before the relics of

the older days. Tired of the flower-scent and chatter and repeated "ohs" and "ahs" of those assembled in the main hall, we had retired to the Gallery of Mummies for a moment's respite, and stood beside the bronze-barred window at its farther end as Dolores entered.

"Would you like to meet her?" I asked as the Frenchman's interested gaze stayed fixed upon the girl.

"Corbleu, does the heliotrope desire to face the sun?" he answered. "Yes, my friend, present me, if you will, and I shall call you blessed.

"Enchanté, Mademoiselle," he assured her as he raised her fingers to his lips. "You are like a breath of life among these relics of mortality; a star which is reflected in the black tides of the Styx."

The girl looked round her with a little shudder of repulsion.

"I hate these ancient things," she told us. "Carlos wasn't sure he wanted to part with them after Father spent so many years collecting them, but I urged him to present them to the museum. I hope I never have to look at them again. The jewels are ghastly—cold and dead as the people who once wore them, and the mummies——" She paused and looked distastefully at the upright mummy which faced us through the screen of dust-proof glass.

"Mummy and Coffin of Sit-ankh-hku, Priestess of Isis, from Hierakonpolis. Period XIXth Dynasty (circa. 1,200 B. C.)" she read aloud from the neatly lettered card. "Can you fancy living in the house with things like that? She might have been a girl about my age, judging by the portrait on the coffin top. Every time I looked at her it was as though I looked at my own body lying in that coffin."

The mummy and its case were usual types. In the open casket stood the mummy, barely five feet tall, swathed in closely wrapped brown cerecloth, banded latitudinally and diagonally with retaining bandages, the head a mere conical hooded protuberance above the slanting shoulders, no trace of arms apparent, feet shown merely as a horizontal shelf beneath the upright body. On the lid, which stood beside the coffin proper, had been carved a face to represent the dead. The features were small, patrician, delicately hawk-nosed and full-lipped, with narrow brows of vivid black arched over eyes of peacock blue. The ancient artist had worked well. Here was no mere mortuary portrait, typical of race and era, but lacking personality. It was, I felt on looking at it, a faithful likeness of the girl who died three thousand years ago, personalized and individual.

De Grandin studied it a moment, then: "One understands, *Mademoiselle,"* he told her. "When one looks at that face it takes small imagination to conceive that it resembles you. She had rare beauty, that old one, just as you—*sapristi,* what is it, *Mademoiselle?"*

Dolores stood before the mummy-case, staring at the painted face with a set, unwinking gaze. Her countenance was mask-like, almost totally expressionless; yet something that was lurking terror lay within her eyes, rendering them glassy, shallow. It was as if a curtain had been drawn across them from within, hiding anything that might be seen by one who looked in them and leaving only a suggestion of sheer fright and horror printed on the retina.

"Mademoiselle Dolores!" he repeated sharply. "What is it?" Then, as she swayed unsteadily, "Catch her, my friend," he ordered. "She swoons!"

Even as he cried his warning the girl oscillated dizzily, with a sort of circular motion, as though her feet were fast-pivoted upon the floor, then pitched for-

ward toward the glass-framed mummy-case, and as she toppled forward her eyes were wide and staring, fixed in fascination on the painted face upon the coffin lid. My arm went round her as she swayed, and a gasp of wonder choked my words of sympathy unuttered. From sandal-sole to head she was rigid as a frozen thing; taut, hard, unyielding as a hypnotist's assistant in a trance.

The rigor that affected her was such that we carried her across the room as though she had lain on a litter.

"What in heaven's name is it?" I demanded as we laid her on a Theban couch of sycamore and ivory. We could not chafe her hands, for they were set so firmly that they might have been carved wood, and when I placed my hand upon her breast to feel her heart, the flesh beneath her velvet corsage met my touch unyieldingly. It might have been a lovely waxen tailor's dummy over which we leant rather than the vibrant girl to whom we talked a moment since.

"Perhaps I'd better get some water," I suggested, but de Grandin stayed me with a gesture.

"Non," he advised. "Stay here and watch with me, my friend. This is—*s's'sh,* she is recovering!"

The set and horrified expression in Dolores' eyes was giving way, and in its stead we saw what seemed to be a look of recognition, like that of one who comes upon an old and long-forgotten scene, and fails at first to place it in his memory. The rigid, hard lines faded from her cheeks and jaw, and her slender bosom fluttered with a gasp of inspiration as her lips fell open and a little sigh escaped them. The words she used I could not understand, for they were spoken in a mumbling undertone, strung together closely, like an invocation hurriedly pronounced, but it seemed to me they had a harsh and guttural sound, as though containing many consonants, unlike any tongue with which I was familiar.

She sang softly, in an eery, rising cadence, with a sharply accented note at the end of every measure, over and over the same meaningless jargon, a weird, uncanny tune, vaguely like a Gregorian chant. One single sound I recognized—or thought I did—though whether it really were a word or whether my mind broke its syllables apart and fitted them to the sound of a more or less familiar name I could not tell; but it seemed to me that constantly recurring through the rapid flow of mumbled invocation was a sibilant disyllable, much like our letter *s* said twice in quick succession.

"What's she trying to say—'Isis'?" I asked, raising my eyes from her fluttering lips.

De Grandin was watching her intently, with that fixed, unwinking stare which I had seen him hold for minutes at a time when we were in the amphitheater of a hospital and a work of unique surgery was in progress. He waved an irritated hand at me, but neither spoke nor shifted the intentness of his gaze.

The flow of senseless words grew slower, thinner, as though the force of breath behind the red and twitching lips were lessening. *"Ah mon . . . sss-sss . . . se-rhus——"* came the softly whispered slurring syllables; then, as the faint voice ceased entirely, a gleam of consciousness came into Dolores' eyes, and she looked from Jules de Grandin to me with a puzzled frown. "Oh, did I faint?" she asked apologetically. "It was so terribly hot in there"—she gestured toward the crowded auditorium—"I thought it would be better here, but I suppose——" She raised her shoulders in the faint suggestion of a shrug, leaving her explanation uncompleted. Then, composedly,

she swung her feet to the floor and placed her hand upon my arm.

"Will you take me to the coat room and call my car, please, Doctor?" she requested. "I think I'm about done in. Better be getting home before I have another fainting-fit."

"THAT was one of the most remarkable exhibitions of autosuggestion I've ever seen," I declared as we drove home.

"U'm?" said Jules de Grandin.

"It was," I answered firmly. "I'll admit it was uncanny as the devil, but the explanation's logical enough. That poor child had developed such a detestation of those mummies that it amounted almost to an obsession. Tonight, while she was staring at the face upon that coffin top—you'll recall she said it looked like her?—she suddenly went rigid as a mummy herself. Hypnosis induced by a carefully self-built-up train of thought identifying herself with the mummy of that priestess, then the fatigue of the reception, finally the ideal combination of the polished glass case reflecting a bright light and the face upon the coffin lid to focus her gaze. And, did you notice, she even mumbled some sort of gibberish while she was unconscious? Absolute identification with the character of the priestess. I don't think Carlos got those mummies out of his house one day too soon for his sister's mental health."

"I agree," de Grandin answered heartily. "Perhaps he did not move as quickly as he should. Her case will bear our observation, I believe."

"Oh, then you don't agree with my theory of autosuggestion and self-hypnosis?"

"*Eh bien,* they are queer things, these minds of ours," he returned evasively. "Hypnotism, what is it? No one rightly knows. Is it the 'animal magnetism' of Mesmer, or the substitution of the operator's mind for that of his subject, or, as some have hinted, the domination of one soul and spirit by another? Me, I do not know; neither do you. But he who plays with it toys with something perilously akin to magic—not always good magic, by the way, my friend."

He paused a moment, drumming on the silver knob of his ebony opera stick with restless fingers; then, abruptly: "Do me a favor, my friend," he begged. "Arrange that we may continue our acquaintance with Monsieur Mendoza and his so charming sister. I would observe her further, if such a thing is possible. I do not like the prospect of the future for that little lovely one."

MENDOZA'S dinner was perfection; oysters with champagne *brut,* dry sherry with the turtle soup, pheasant with ripe Conti, Madeira with dessert and '47 cognac with the coffee. De Grandin had been gay throughout the meal, brimming with high spirits, recounting anecdote on anecdote of humorous adventure in the tropics, in the war, of student days in Paris and Vienna. When books were mentioned he was equally at home in French and English literature, discussing Villon, Huysmans, Verlaine, Lamartine and Francis Thompson with impartial intimacy.

Another guest was with us, a Doktor-professor Grafensburg whose huge square head topped with close-cut, bristling hair, square spectacles and sweeping handlebar mustache, no less than his ponderous manner and poorly fitting dinner clothes, labeled him unmistakably a scientist of the Viennese school. He seemed quite lost among the small talk of the table, and occasionally when de Grandin let fly a particularly witty sally he would look up helplessly, as though

he sought to mark the flight of some swift-moving insect through the air. Now, cigar between the pudgy fingers of one hand, liqueur glass grasped firmly in the other, he sat foursquare before the fire of blazing apple logs and looked at Mendoza with something like pathetic appeal in his protuberant blue eyes.

"Doktor Grafensburg has consented to go over some of my—some of the mummies in the Harkness Museum," Carlos volunteered with a smile at the big Austrian. "Many of them have never been properly classified, and there's a mass of data to be translated and catalogued."

"*Ach,* yes," replied the savant, his infantile eyes beaming at this chance to take the center of the stage, "there are some most unusual things which your father's curators had completely overlooked, Herr Carlos. That little, small one, for example, the one they call the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku, she had never even been unwrapped, yet in her bandages I found a something truly startling."

"Ah?" breathed Jules de Grandin softly, as a momentary glitter shone in his small blue eyes. "What, by example, *Herr Doktor?*"

Grafensburg rose ponderously and stood before the Frenchman, legs apart, great head thrust forward between his bulging shoulders. "You are, perhaps, familiar with Egyptian beliefs?" he asked challengingly.

"I would not presume to discuss them with the *Herr Doktorprofessor* Grafensburg," replied the Frenchman diplomatically. "Would you not be kind enough to tell us——"

"*Ja wohl,*" the Austrian broke in discourteously. "They had no idea of the things we know today, those ancient ones. They thought the arteries were full of air, the seat of the emotions was the heart, that anger generated in the spleen, *nicht wahr?*"

"So we have been told," de Grandin nodded.

"I tell you the same, also," rumbled Grafensburg. "Also I tell you that they had partly grasped the truth when they said that reason resided in the brain. Now, in the wrappings of this Priestess Sit-ankh-hku I found the customary mortuary tablet, the golden plate on which her name and titles were engraved, with the usual pious invocation to the gods, and the pious hope of final resurrection in the flesh, only it was different. You know the reason for the mummification of Egyptian dead, yes? They believed that when three thousand years had passed the soul returned to claim its body, and without a habitation of the flesh would have nowhere to go. It would have to wander bodiless and nameless in Amenti, the realm of the damned. As the little lady lived about the time of the Oppression, she should now be ready for reanimation——"

"Perfectly, *Herr Doktor,*" de Grandin nodded, "one understands, but——"

"*Ha,* little man, but you do not understand!" the Austrian thrust his cigar forward as though it had been a weapon. "Usually the tablets prayed the gods to guide the *ka,* or vital principle, back to the waiting body. This one does nothing of the kind. It asserts—asserts, if you please, asserts with positiveness — that Sit-ankh-hku will rise again with the help of one who lives, and by the power of the brain. That is most unusual; it is extraordinary. Never before in the annals of all Egyptology have we found an instance where the deceased will rise otherwise than by the help of the gods. This one will rise by the assistance of a man who lives, or perhaps of a woman, the text is not quite clear. But rise she

will, by human assistance and by strength of brain. *Donnerwetter,* it is droll, *nicht wahr?* She will reanimate herself by the power of her brain, and that brain was flung into the Nile three thousand years ago, together with her blood!" he finished with a rumbling laugh.

"I do not think that it is droll, *Herr Doktor,*" de Grandin answered in a level voice. "I rather think that it is devilish. That statement which you read may go far to explain what—*grand Dieu,* look to Mademoiselle Dolores, Friend Trowbridge!"

At his shouted warning I wheeled round. Dolores stood beside the grand piano, a straight, slim silhouette in lettuce green, pearl-pale and rigid as an image. Even as I leaped to aid her the thought flashed through my mind that she was like a gallant little tree whose roots were severed by the woodsman's ax. She swayed uncertainly a moment, then leant from the perpendicular like a toppling tower. Had I not seized her in my arms she would have fallen flat upon her face, for every nerve and muscle of her slender body had been petrified in the same awful way as on that night at the museum, and as my hands closed round her I was shaken by a feeling of repulsion at the hardness of her flesh.

"Dolores dear, what is it?" Carlos cried as he placed his sister on a sofa.

"Is—is it epilepsy?" he asked fearfully, as he saw the girl's pale skin and set and staring eyes.

De Grandin's face was almost totally expressionless, but anger-lightning flashed in his small eyes as he responded tonelessly: "Monsieur Mendoza, one cannot be quite sure, but I think she is suffering from an attack of the *Herr Doktor's* cursed *drôlerie.*"

Treatment was futile. All night Dolores lay as rigid as if petrified. As though she had been dead, her temperature was exactly that of the surrounding atmosphere, the uncanny hardness of the flesh persisted, and she was unresponsive to all stimuli, save that the pupils of her set and staring eyes showed a slight contraction when we flashed a light in them. There was practically no pulse perceptible, and when we drove a hypodermic needle in her arm to administer a dose of strychin there was no reflex flinching of the skin, and the impression we had was more like that of thrusting a pin through some tough ceraceous substance than through yielding flesh. As far as we could see, every vital function was suspended. Yet she was not dead. Of that much we were certain.

Toward morning the dreadful stiffness, so like rigor-mortis, passed, and as at the museum, she began to hum a chant, a weird and oddly accented tune composed of four soft minor notes. This time enunciation seemed more perfect, and we could recognize a phrase which constantly recurred throughout the chant like an imperative refrain repeated endlessly: *"O Sit-ankh-hku, nehes — O Sit-ankh-hku, nehes!"*

"Morbleu!" exclaimed de Grandin as a light of recognition flashed in his eyes. *"Par la barbe d'un bouc vert,* do you apprehend the burden of her song, Friend Trowbridge?"

"Of course not," I replied. "This gibberish hasn't any meaning, has it?"

"Has it not, *ha?*" he shot back. "Me, I shall say it has. It is the tongue of ancient Egypt that she chants, my friend, and that phrase she constantly repeats means: *'Awake, O Sit-ankh-hku; O Sit-ankh-hku, awake!'* "

"Good Lord, identification with that devilish mummy again!" I exclaimed. "Confound that Grafensburg and his childish talk about the thing, he——"

"He is a species of a camel," cut in Jules de Grandin. "May the fires of hell consume him living—he called me 'little man'!"

DESPITE our every effort, Dolores failed to show improvement. Cold compresses on the head, caustics on brow and neck, and repeated stimulants alike seemed powerless to rouse her from her lethargy. Occasionally the delirium in which she chanted thick-tongued invocations lightened the profound coma of absolute unconsciousness; but these spells came unbidden and unheralded, and we were powerless to lift her into consciousness or strike the slightest note of response from her, however much we tried.

"Dieu de Dieu!" de Grandin swore when three days of unavailing work had brought us close to nervous breakdown; "me, I am slowly going crazy. This *sacré* coma which has taken hold on her, I do not like it."

"D'ye think there's any chance of her recovering?" I asked, more for the sake of making conversation than from any hope of favorable response.

"Tiens; le bon Dieu and the devil know, not I," he answered somberly, his speculative gaze upon the patient. For a space of several minutes he continued his inspection, then plucked me by the sleeve. "Do you observe it, *mon ami?"* he asked.

"Eh?"

"Her face, her hands—the whole of her?"

"I don't think——" I began, but:

"Look at her carefully," he ordered. "We have forced the vital functions artificially. Elimination we have had, and nourishment by forcible feeding; moreover, she has lain this way for a scant three days, but observe her if you will. Is she not more than normally emaciated?"

He was right. While some loss of weight was normally to have been expected, emaciation had progressed far past the normal point. The subcutaneous tissue seemed to have dissolved, leaving little more than unfilled skin upon the staring bones. Paper-thin, her cheeks seemed plastered to the jaw-joints of her skull, lips thin as tight-stretched parchment showed the outlines of her teeth, and her very eyeballs seemed deflated, so that the eyes were merely empty pits in a cadaverous face. Wrist processes and radii showed almost as plainly through the drum-tight skin of forearms as though they had no covering at all.

"Good heavens, yes, you're right," I told de Grandin. "Why, she's desiccated as a mummy!"

"Tu parles, mon vieux," he responded grimly. "Like a mummy—yes, by blue, you have put your finger on the word! Come."

"Come?" I echoed. "What d'ye mean, Surely, you'll not leave her——"

"But yes, of course," he interrupted. "The *garde-malade* can watch by her. She can at least report her death, which is all that we could do if we remained. Meanwhile, there is a chance . . . yes, my friend, I think there is a little. so small chance. . . .

"TO THE Harkness Museum," he ordered the taxi driver, "and hurry, if you please. There is five dollars extra for you if you get us there within ten minutes."

"I'm afraid Doctor Grafensburg can't see you now, sir," said the attendant when de Grandin panted his demand that we be taken to the Austrian at once. "He's very busy in his office, and left strict orders——"

"Ah bah," the little Frenchman cut in. "You tell me *that* when we are come upon an errand that may mean the saving

of a life? Where is this pig-dog's utterly unmentionable office? Me, I will go to him without announcement. Only show us where he hibernates, my friend, and I shall take the full responsibility for disturbing him. Yes, certainly; of course."

"Kreuzsakrament! Did I not strict orders leave that I should not be bothered?" Doktor Grafensburg's big face turned toward us with a snarl of almost bestial fury as we wrenched aside his office door and hastened toward him. He was gowned in linen, as for an autopsy, and glared at us across a porcelain operating-table on which there lay a partly unbandaged mummy. A shiver of repulsion ran through me. With his great head hunched forward, mouth disfigured by the stream of curses which he hurled at us, he reminded me of some foul ghoul disturbed at its repast. The furious scowl lightened somewhat as he recognized us, but his effort at cordiality was plainly forced as he drew a sheet across the mummy on the table and came forward.

"So? Is it you, little man?" he asked with ponderous jocularity. "I had thought that you were busy taking temperatures and mixing pills."

"Sale bête!" de Grandin murmured underneath his breath; then, aloud:

"We have just come from Mademoiselle Mendoza's sickroom," he explained. "Something has happened which has made our presence here imperative. Is it the mummy of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku you are working on, *Herr Doktor?"*

Grafensburg glared at him suspiciously. "And if it is?" he countered.

"Précisément, if it is, we should greatly like to see what you have found, if anything. Her physical condition, the extent of preservation of her body, is of great importance to us. May we inspect it?"

"Nein!" the other spread his arms in a protective gesture, as though de Grandin made a threat against the mummy on the table. "She is mine, and only I may look at her. When I have my investigation made and my notes arranged, you may read what I have found; meantime——"

There was the menace of cold hatred in de Grandin's voice as he cut in—"Meantime, *mon cher collègue,* you will kindly stand aside and let me look at that ten-thousand-times-accursed mummy, or I shall give myself the great felicity of sending your fat soul to hell." From his shoulder holster he snatched out a pistol and aimed it steadily at the Austrian's protruding paunch.

"Allez—en avant," he ordered as the other stared at him with dilated eyes. "I do not feel inclined to argue with you, my pig-ugly one."

Muttering thick-throated curses, Grafensburg gave ground, and de Grandin reached his free hand toward the sheet, twitching it from the half-stripped mummy on the operating-table.

"Ah?" he breathed as the cotton covering came fluttering off. *"Ah-ha? Ah-ha-ha?"*

I stared in blank amazement.

The form upon the table was no mummy. Denuded of their centuries-old bandages, the head and shoulders were exposed, and from the face Herr Grafensburg had lifted the gold mummy-mask. A pale, exquisite countenance looked up at us, clear-cut as cameo. The brow was low and broad, framed in a mass of fine, dark hair bound round the temples with a diadem of woven silver set with lapis-lazuli. The nose was small and delicately aquiline, the mouth a trifle wide and rather thin-lipped, a wilful, proud and somewhat cruel mouth, I thought. Long, curling lashes rested on the youthful, rounded cheeks. Bare, creamy shoulders gleamed beneath the

little pointed chin, and from the torn and powdered wrappings, still crossed on the breast, a pair of slender, red-tipped hands peeped out like fragile lilies blooming in corruption. I gazed upon the lovely face in awed amazement, realizing that these silk-fringed eyes had looked upon the world three thousand years ago. How many men had lived and died since those pale lips had drawn the breath of life and those closed eyes had looked upon the sun-gilt, star-jeweled skies of ancient Egypt!

De Grandin drew his breath in with a sort of whistling gasp. *"Mon Dieu,"* he whispered softly, "cannot you see it, good Friend Trowbridge? Does not the likeness strike you?"

"Yes — *yes!"* I breathed. "You're right; she does resemble poor Dolores. One could swear that they are sisters, though they lived three thousand years apart."

"Himmelkreuzsakrament!" raged Doktor Grafensburg. "You come in here, you crazy, brainless *schmetterling,* and point pistols at me; you interrupt me at my work, you take from me my beautiful, incomparable one, and——"

"Calm yourself, *mon collègue,"* broke in Jules de Grandin with a smile. "We would not for the world disturb you at your work, but we desire certain information which only you can give. This is truly an amazing piece of body preservation. I have seen many mummies in my time, but never one like this. Tell me, if you will; have you some theory of the method they employed to keep her as we see her now?"

The Austrian's pale eyes blazed with enthusiasm.

"Nein, nein," he answered huskily. "I was unwrapping her when you came in. I was about to make a set of careful measurements and note them down; then I would make an autopsy to find how they performed the work to her preserve this way. By heaven, it is a marvel! It is something never seen before. *Herr Gott,* it is——"

"One agrees entirely," de Grandin nodded, "but——"

"Nein, lieber Gott—you do not understand!" the Austrian cut in. "You have seen mummies, *ja?* You know they are deprived of moisture-content, left with nothing but the husk of bone and tissue, *ja?* But—*Donnerwetter!*—did you ever see a mummy which could take up moisture from the air and resume the look of life it had before the old embalmers pickled it, *hein?"*

The little Frenchman's small blue eyes were dancing with excitement, his tightly waxed wheat-blond mustache seemed fairly quivering as he faced the fleshy Austrian. *"Herr Doktor,"* he asked half tremulously, "do you tell me that this mummy-thing has seemed revived——"

"Sehr wohl," the Austrian broke in, "have I not told you so? When first I took that mummy from its case it was a mummy, nothing more. All moisture had been from it dried; it weighed not more than thirty pounds. I the outer layer of bindings stripped away, then stopped to read and translate the inscription on the pectoral tablet. Three days it lay here partially unwrapped. Today—*Herr Gott!*—I start to take the other bindings off, and what do I discover? Not the mummy I had left three days before, but the lovely, life-like body of a lovely woman! *Herr Gott,* she has begun to blossom like a flower in the moisture of the air! She enchants me; I love her as I never loved a woman in my life; I can scarcely wait to cut her open!"

De Grandin looked at Grafensburg a moment; then: *"Meinherr,"* he asked,

"does human life mean anything to you?"

The big man stared at him as though he had been something he had never seen before, then raised his shoulders in a ponderous shrug.

"If it does," resumed the Frenchman, "you have now the chance to aid us. This body, this lovely, evil thing must be destroyed, and quickly. Believe me, life depends on it."

"Nein!" cried the other in a voice gone thin with sudden panic. "I cannot have it so. Not for a hundred human lives shall you lay hands upon my *liebes liebchen* till I have the autopsy performed on her. Men have died and worms have eaten them ten thousand thousand times since the embalmers of old Egypt finished with their labors on this body. Men will die until the end of time, but here we have a miracle of science. What is one paltry life compared with the disclosures an autopsy on this body will give us? Bah, you little pill-peddler, you tinkerer of broken bones, you set your stupid trade above the cause of science? You would hold the clock-hands back that you might spare some little, worthless life a few years longer? By heaven! I say you shall not touch this body with your little finger! Out, out of my cabinet, out, before I throw you!" Popeyes blazing, heavy lips drawn backward in a snarl, he advanced on Jules de Grandin, heedless of the latter's pistol as though it had been but a pointed finger.

"Halte la!" de Grandin cried. "I will make the bargain with you. Bring this body which you so adore to Monsieur Mendoza's house this evening, and promise me you will perform your autopsy upon it before midnight, and I will consent. Refuse, and—it would be some loss to science if I had to shoot you dead, *Herr Doktor,* but if I must I will. Make no mistake about it."

For a moment they glared in each other's eyes; then, with a shrug of resignation, the big Austrian turned back. Half the other's size, dandified, almost effeminate, de Grandin nevertheless bore the stamp of the born killer, and in the steady gaze of his little, round blue eyes the Austrian savant had seen the bare-boned face of death. For all his ponderous size and his bloodless, cold devotion to his science, Herr Doktor Grafensburg was something of a coward, and his blustering bravado melted like a snow-patch in the sun before the Frenchman's cold determination.

"Ja wohl," he finally agreed. "Leave me to my work this afternoon. I will the body have at Herr Mendoza's house tonight at eight."

"WHAT the dickens does it mean?" I asked as we drove toward Mendoza's. "Have you found some explanation for this chapter of strange incidents——"

"Non," he broke in, "I am at sea, my friend. I, the clever one, the shrewd, so wily fox, am faced with a blank wall. This business of the monkey passes my experiences. I am a poor and purblind stupid fool. Let me think!"

"But——"

"Precisely-exactly, 'but'," he agreed, nodding. "Consider, if you please: Mademoiselle Dolores has been ill three days. She is unconscious in a coma, and we cannot waken her. She loses weight so quickly that within the little space of seventy-two hours she has become to all appearances a cadaver—a mummy, by blue! Meantime, what happens at the museum? The swinish Grafensburg partially unwraps the mummy of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku, then stops to read her

pectoral tablet. Three days elapse, and in their course the mummy of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku puts on the semblance of a new-dead body. What is the next step in this dual transformation, *hein?*"

"But there may be something in the theory Grafensburg advances," I argued. "We've seen dehydrated food—apples, for instance. Though shrunken to a husk, and bearing no more resemblance to their original state than a mummy resembles a fresh body, when they're put in water they fill out and almost simulate fresh fruit. Isn't it possible that the embalmers of old Egypt might have hit upon some process of dehydration whereby the body would take up moisture from the air when it had been unwrapped, and——"

"*Ah bah,*" he interrupted in disgust. "Grafensburg can read hieroglyphs, Grafensburg knows Egyptology, but also Grafensburg is a great fool!"

A CASE of leucocytopenia I had under observation at Mercy Hospital kept me later than I had expected, and preparations were complete when I reached Mendoza's house that night. Thin, frail, emaciated, looking more like a cadaver than a living person, Dolores lay swathed in blankets on a lounge. Beside her, close as though ready for a blood transfusion, lay the blanketed body of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku, and as I looked upon the two pale faces I was struck anew with the strange resemblance each bore to the other. The only light in the room was that given by a red-bowled vigil lamp which de Grandin placed about two feet from, and midway between, the two dark heads pillowed on their couches, and the flickering, fitful gleam of the little lamp's short wick cast a shifting mottle of shadows on the equally immobile faces of the living and the dead.

Silently de Grandin crossed the room, drew back the curtains at the window and looked up at the sky. "The moon is rising," he announced at length. "It will soon be time for our experiment."

For something like five minutes he stood at gaze; then, as a shaft of silver light stole through the window and across the floor, splashing a little pool of luminance upon the two still faces, he stepped quickly to the lamp, blew out its flame, and from beneath his jacket drew a roll of silken gossamer.

"*Lieber Gott!*" cried Grafensburg as de Grandin spread the silver tissue out, laying part of it across the dead girl's face, the other end across Dolores' white, still countenance. "Where—where did you get that? It is a portion of the——"

"Silence, *cochon,*" bade the little Frenchman sharply. "It is a fragment of the veil of Isis which hung before her altar-throne that the profane might not see her godhead. It will help us get in contact with the past—one hopes."

Now the moonlight shone full on the girls' veiled faces, touching them with argent gilding. De Grandin laid one hand upon Dolores' brow and touched the forehead of the long-dead priestess with the finger-tips of the other. There was something measured, monotonous as a chant, in his voice as he called out softly: "Mademoiselle Dolores, you can hear me when I speak?"

A moment's silence; then, so softly we could scarcely hear, soft as a breath of wind among the leafless branches of a tree, but still distinct enough to understand, there came the answer: "I can hear you."

"You can hear the chiming of the sistra; you can hear the chanting of the priests?"

"I can hear them!"

"Open the eyes of your memory; look

around you—tell us what it is you see. I order, I command it."

As the answer came I started violently. Was it a vagary of overwrought nerves, or did my ears deceive me? I could not surely tell, but it seemed that by some odd trick of ventriloquism the reply came not only from Dolores, but from the dead girl at her side, as well. They seemed speaking in soft chorus!

"I am in a lofty temple," came the faltering, halting answer. "Sistra ring and harps are playing, priestesses are chanting hymns. A man has come into the temple. He is young and very beautiful. He is robed in white. His head is shaven smooth. He has paused before the silver veil that hangs between the temple and the face of Isis. He has put aside the veil and gone through a low door. I can no longer see him."

We could hear the soft rustle of the April wind in the budding trees outside; somewhere in the house a clock ticked steadily, and its ticking sounded like the blows of some great hammer on a giant anvil. The sharp staccato yelp of a taxi's horn out in the street was almost deafening in the silence of that darkened room. Then there came another sound. No, not quite a sound; rather, it was like that subjective sense of ringing in the inner ear we have after taking a heavy dose of quinine, more the *impression* of a sound than any actual vibration. Bell-like it was, almost unbearably shrill, unspeakably sweet; nearly toneless, yet utterly fascinating. I felt a sense of drowsiness come stealing over me, and with it the impression of another presence in the room was borne upon me. There was another — some one — some *thing* — among us, and I shivered as though a chill hand had suddenly been passed across my cheek.

"What is the ceremony you are witnessing?" de Grandin asked, and his voice seemed faint and far away.

"A man is entering the priesthood. He is in the sanctuary of the goddess now. She will come to him and flood him with her spirit. He will be her own for time and for eternity. He will put away the love of woman and the hope of children from his heart, and devote himself for ever to the service of the great All-Mother."

"Who is this man?"

"I do not know his name, but he was born a Hebrew. He has put aside his God to take the vows of Isis for love of a priestess of the goddess. She has put a spell on him; he is mad for love of her, but because she is forbid to marry by her vows he has abjured Jehovah and become a heathen priest that he may be near her in the temple and commune with her in common worship of the goddess."

"What else do you see?"

"I see nothing. All is dark."

WE WAITED a tense moment; then: "Is it over—have you finished?" I asked, edging toward the light-switch. Somehow, I felt, with the friendly glow of electricity upon us, that sense of being in the room with something alien would fade away.

The Frenchman hushed my question with an upraised hand. "Tell us what you witness now?" he ordered, leaning forward till his breathing stirred the silver veil which lay upon Dolores' face.

"It is daylight. The sun shines brightly on a temple's painted pylon. The sacred birds are feeding in the courtyard. I see a woman cross the forecourt. It is I. I am robed in a white robe which leaves my bosom and my ankles bare. Sandals of papyrus shoe my feet. Jewels are on my arms and a band of silver crowns my

hair. In one hand I bear a lotus bud, and a water-pot is in the other. I am going to the fountain. An old man accosts me. He is very feeble. His hair and beard are white as snow. He wears a blue robe and red turban. He is a Hebrew. He raises his hands and curses me. He tells me I have charmed his son away from God, and have made a heathen of him. He curses me in life and death. He calls the curse of Yahweh on me. I laugh at him and call him Jewish dog and slave. He curses me again and tells me I shall find no rest until atonement has been made. He swears that I must walk the earth again in penance and humility.

"Now I see the youth who took the vows of Isis. He is dead. A wound gapes like a flower in his throat. His Jewish brethren have set on him and killed him for apostasy. I bend over him and kiss him on the lips, and on the gaping, bloody wound. My tears fall on his face. I tear my hair and throw dust on my head. But he does not answer to my cries. I swear that I will join him.

"I seek out Ana the magician. He is old and wise and very wicked. I promise him what he will if he will make it so that I can join the man who forsook his race and God for me. He tells me I must be a Jewess, but I know this cannot be, for I am Egyptian. He says that when the time for my awakening comes and my *ka* comes back to seek its earthly tenement, he can make me rise a Jewess. I ask him what his fee will be, and he says it is I. So I yield myself to his embrace, and then, because I know the priests will stone me with stones until I die because I broke my vows of chastity, I throw myself into the Nile. Ana the magician takes my body and prepares it for the tomb."

Silence heavy as a cloud of darkness settled on the room as the last faint, halting sentence ended. The shaft of moonlight had vanished from the window, and the still, couched forms were barely visible. There was a queer, sharp freshness to the air, as though it had been ozonated by a thunder-storm. Almost, it seemed to me, there was a quality of intoxication in the atmosphere, and mechanically I put my hand upon my wrist to test my pulsation. My heart was almost racing, and throughout my body there tingled a feeling of physical well-being like that one feels upon a mountain-top in summer.

"Lights!" came Jules de Grandin's hail. "*Grand Dieu*—Trowbridge, Grafensburg, make lights; it is incredible!"

I stumbled through the gloom, found the wall-switch and turned on the electricity. De Grandin stood between the silent bodies, a mute forefinger pointed at each.

"Look, observe; behold!" he ordered.

I blinked my eyes and shook my head. Surely this was some gamin trick of faulty senses. Dolores lay in quiet sleep, lips softly parted, limbs relaxed, a faint but unmistakable glow of health upon her cheeks. Beside her lay the body of the priestess, and already it seemed undergoing dissolution. The once firm cheeks were sunken in, the eye-holes so depressed they were no more than hollow pits; the lips were drawn back from the staring teeth, and on the skin there lay that hideous tint of leprous gray which is the harbinger of putrefaction.

"Quickly, Grafensburg," de Grandin bade, "if you would make your precious autopsy you had better be about it while there yet is time. Take her away. We follow you soon."

THE Herr Doktorprofessor Grafensburg stripped off his rubber gloves and looked from me to Jules de Grandin,

then back again in blank bewilderment. "By heaven!" he swore, "never have I a thing like this seen before. Never; never! She was a mummy first, *kollegen,* as perfect a specimen of embalming as ever I have seen, and thousands of them have I unwrapped. Then she was a woman, almost living, breathing. Next she becomes a *kadaver,* a long-dead corpse, already almost reeking. *Lieber Gott,* I cannot understand it!"

"Yet the autopsy——" de Grandin murmured, but:

"Ach, ja," excitedly broke in the Austrian, "it showed hers was a body like the thousand others I have cut apart. *Donnerwetter,* I might have been in hospital dissecting the dead corpse of one who died in bed a little while before! Brain, heart and lungs, viscera—everything she had in life, were all in place. *Herr Gott,* she had not been embalmed at all according to Egyptian custom; only dried and bandaged! I am in the sea of doubt submerged. I cannot tell my right hand from my left; my experience is of no value here. Have you perhaps a theory?"

De Grandin shed his linen operating-gown and lit a cigarette. "I have an hypothesis," he answered slowly, "but I would not care to dignify it by the name of theory. The other night when Mademoiselle Dolores went insensible before that mummy in the museum, she was like one hypnotized. She made a quick recovery, so we thought, but only to be seized again when you told us of the strange inscription you had found upon the pectoral tablet of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku. Why was this? one wonders.

"Me, I think I have the answer. Thoughts are things, immortal things. Thought emanations, especially those produced by violent emotions, have a way of permeating physical objects and remaining in them as the odor of the flowers lingers in the vase, or the sweet perfume of sandalwood remains for all to smell long after life departs from out the tree. Very well, consider: Too-late-awakened love, perhaps, shook this ancient priestess' being to its very core; she would make atonement for the sin she had committed against the Jewish youth who loved her more than he adored his God. That was the thought which moved her when she struck her so abominable bargain with the wizard Ana; the thought persisted when she cast herself into the Nile. *And though her body died, the thought lived on.*

"When Ana the magician made her body ready for the tomb he mummified it by some secret process of his own, not by the technique of the *paraschites.* And, further to concentrate the thought which dominated her, he carved upon her pectoral mortuary tablet the prediction that she would arise through the agency of her brain—her thought, if you prefer—rather than by intervention of the gods.

"Mademoiselle Dolores is a psychic. As she paused before the mummy of this so unfortunate young girl the tragic history of her life and pitiable death was borne to her as the scent of mummy spices which have been borne to one less susceptible to psychical suggestion. Unwittingly Friend Trowbridge sensed the truth when he said that she 'identified herself with the mummy'.

"My friends, she was infected with the thought-force emanating from that long-dead mummy, even as she might have taken germ-contagion from it. Sit-ankh-hku would expiate her sin of long ago by resurrection as a Jewess. Mademoiselle Dolores is a Jewess. Strangely, by coincidence, perhaps, the two resembled each other. *Voilà,* the thought-cycle was completed. Dolores Mendoza would become Sit-ankh-hku; Sit-ankh-hku would com-

pletely dominate—displace—the personality of Dolores Mendoza. Yes, undoubtlessly it was so.

"These things I surmised without knowing them. It was a process of instinct rather than of reason. *Alors,* I blended the modern with the ancient. There is much to say in favor of the Freudian psychology, even though it has been made the happy hunting-ground of pornography by some who practise it. Mademoiselle Dolores suffered from a 'complex', a series of emotionally accented ideas in a repressed state. A thought-thorn was imbedded in her personality. While it remained there it would fester. Accordingly, we must take it out, as we would take out a physical thorn from her physical body if she were not to suffer an infection.

"I had you bring the body of the olden one and lay it close beside her that she might be *en rapport* with things which happened in the long ago. For the same reason I secured the veil of Isis and laid it on her face. It, too, was pregnant with the thought-forms of an ancient day. Finally, I waited for the moon to shine upon her, for the moon was sacred to the Goddess Isis, and each little thing which brought her nearer to the past brought the past nearer us. I sent her questing spirit backward to the days of old. I bade her tell us what she saw and heard, and through her living lips dead Sit-ankh-hku disclosed the tragedy which came to her three thousand years ago.

"*Enfin,* we took the stopper from the jar of scent, and the perfume, liberated in the air, disseminated. Those old tragic thoughts, so long locked tightly in Sit-ankh-hku's little body, were set at liberty: they thinned and drifted off like vapor in a breeze—*pouf!* they were gone for ever. No longer will they ride Mademoiselle Dolores like an incubus. She is for ever freed from them. It is doubtful if she will retain the slightest memory of the sufferings she underwent while they possessed her."

"But how do you account for Dolores almost changing to a mummy, while the mummy almost came to life?" I asked.

"In Mademoiselle Dolores' case it was, as you have aptly phrased it, a case of 'identifying herself with the mummy'. Under self-hypnosis, originally induced by the thought-force she had absorbed as she stood before the mummy of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku, she forced herself to simulate the mummy's stark rigidity, the very physical appearance of a desiccated lich. In the mummy's case—who knows? Perhaps it was as Doktor Grafensburg suggests, that the body was so treated by the wizard Ana's art that it took up moisture from the air, became rehydrated and put on its original appearance. Me, I think it was a transfer of psychoplasm from Dolores to the mummy which drained the living girl of all life-force and gave her the appearance of a mummy, while the dead form put upon it the appearance of returning life. One cannot surely say, these are but guesses, but my opinion is strengthened by the fact that when Dolores had recounted the tragedy of Sit-ankh-hku she all at once regained her normal look, while dissolution seemed to fall upon the dead girl with the suddenness of striking fate. It was as if a tide of life flowed and ebbed from one to the other. You see? It is most simple."

An expression of bewilderment, mingled with horrified incredulity, spread over Grafensburg's broad face as de Grandin finished speaking. I could scarce refrain from laughing, he looked for all the world like William Jennings Bryan reading Darwin, or a leader of the W. C.

T. U. perusing a de luxe edition of the Bartenders' Guide.

"Lieber Himmel!" he exclaimed. "You—you tell us this? With seriousness you say it? Yes? *Mein Gott, du bist verrückt!* Stay, stay, little man, and rave your crazy ravings. I am going to get drunk!"

A smile of almost heavenly delight lit up de Grandin's face. *"Mon cher ami, mon brave collègue,"* he exclaimed, "for a week I've known you, yet never till this instant have I heard you speak one word of sense!

"Wait till I find my seven-times-accursed hat, and I will go with you!"

In the Shadows

By LEA BODINE DRAKE

As we went up the narrow stair,
  My candle slim and I,
From the crouching shadows came
  A little tired sigh.

And there was nothing on the stair
  Or in my garret room,
But cobwebs on the rafters,
  And corners filled with gloom.

And still and silent was the house,
  And dark and still the air. . . .
But where the shadows wavered
  In the candle-flare,
Something small, unearthly, sighed
  Out of some strange despair.

"He lay on the bed, his head buried deep in the pillow, and his blackened mouth wide open."

The Mystery of the Last Guest

By JOHN FLANDERS

Out of the black night came a grisly horror—a tale of stark terror

IN HIS checkered cap and elderly overcoat, John was no longer the imposing head waiter of the Ocean Queen Hotel. He had become, for the seven-month period during which the seaside resort was dead and deserted, the unpretentious hardware clerk in Mersey Street, Hull.

Mr. Buttercup, proprietor of the hotel, held out a cordial hand to him.

"See you again next summer, John, old fellow," he said.

"God willing, yes," said John as he gravely emptied the farewell glass of whisky which his employer had poured out for him.

The sullen groaning of the high tide filled the air. The fog was low and dense.

"The season's good and over," John declared.

"We're the last folks here—the very last," Mr. Buttercup added.

A dozen silhouettes bending under great formless burdens toiled up the slope which seemed to link the Chinese roof of the microscopic railway station to the dike, checker-boarded like a Dutch kitchen.

"There go the Stalkers leaving," said John. "The light-house keeper told 'em there'd be snow today."

"Snow!" sniffed Mr. Buttercup contemptuously. "What are you talking about? It's October still!"

John studied the sky, oxidized by the salty fog. Flocks of aquatic birds were tracing gloomy figures against it.

"They've left the marshes," he remarked. "It's a bad sign when they do that."

One great, strikingly white bird flew by in a great hurry. "Snow—snow!" it croaked.

"Do you hear that?" said John in jocose triumph.

"But snow—it's too early for snow," Mr. Buttercup protested. Then he added philosophically: "But after all, what difference does it make to me? Tomorrow the vans come for the furniture I don't leave here, and by day after tomorrow I'll be in London."

Kind-hearted John felt the impulse to add something consoling which would make the solitude of his benefactor easier to bear, but he could think of nothing comforting.

"Well, after all, it'll soon be over," he ventured after casting about helplessly for a minute or two.

In the distance, they could hear a hammer pounding feverishly on wood.

"My word!" cried Mr. Buttercup in surprize. "Windgery must be getting out, too. You can hear them nailing up the shutters of his villa."

"Well, then, if *he's* going," said John, "that leaves you all by yourself. When the last train pulls out, the station-master goes down into the village."

Mr. Buttercup started. He would be the only living creature in the place.

"That's what I get for starting up in this little new resort," he grumbled, "instead of following the crowd to Margate or Folkestone."

"But you did quite a little business," John protested gently, patting the pocket in which his bill-fold was stowed away.

"Yes, that's so," Mr. Buttercup admitted.

A locomotive whistled, down beyond the horizon. The sound was slender as a slender thread.

"Train's coming," said John. "Well, good-bye, Mr. Buttercup."

"Oh, you have plenty of time yet. Come, have another whisky!"

"Just one glass more, then, Mr. Buttercup. At my age, a man doesn't run after trains any longer."

MR. BUTTERCUP was left entirely alone, in the gloomy, empty hall. The hammer across the way had long since grown silent.

Mr. Buttercup watched the water come up and dissolve the sand castles which the Stalker children had built in the morning, in a mood of lassitude and melancholy, on the deserted, wind-beaten beach.

"Fee—nee—Fee-nee——" grated a whirling jack-snipe, fleeing across a distant pond.

"Fee—neeshed—fee-neeshed!" corrected Mr. Buttercup, obeying an impulse to prove to the twelve rateen armchairs that he still had the courage to joke.

But neither the jack-snipe nor the twelve chairs reacted sympathetically to his brave pleasantry.

Then he caught sight of a man. The

man was running with desperate rapidity toward the little station. The locomotive whistled, and his efforts grew more violent still. He struggled on like a crazy man. He moved like an unhappy jumping-jack.

Buttercup chortled with delight.

"Windgery is missing the train!" he informed himself. "Ha! ha! What a gorgeous joke!"

The sound of the telephone tore him away from his malicious amusement. It was somebody from the electric light plant, warning him that since the season was over, the current would be cut off in a few minutes.

"But *I'm* still here, I tell you!" protested Mr. Buttercup.

"So you expect to keep the season going all by yourself?" inquired the lightman sarcastically.

"It's none of your business what I expect to do!" declared Mr. Buttercup, losing his temper.

"And it's none of yours what we do here! Do you think we're going to keep this dynamo going to give you the juice for your pocket flashlight?"

"Pocket flashlight! Pocket flashlight!" sputtered Mr. Buttercup, who had dazzling chandeliers in his dining-hall.

"Yes, I said pocket flashlight, old lady!"

A third voice broke into the conversation. It was the station-master.

"Hello! Hello! The telephone service will be discontinued at once. We are closing the station office, and stopping telegraph service."

"And he says he's cutting off the electricity!" Mr. Buttercup wailed.

"It's all the same to me!" growled the man of the rail. "We never had night service here. We've got our own acetylene outfit, and I'm ready to cut loose right now."

By this time Mr. Buttercup was completely beside himself with righteous indignation, and he publicly compared both his interlocutors with certain necessary but unpleasant domestic utensils.

"Sir!" howled the station-master, "you're insulting a public official, you contemptible hot-water peddler, you!"

This vivid phrase excited the spirit of emulation of the electrician, who contributed some original metaphors drawn from his Sunday piscatorial experiences.

A copious dictionary of insults was rapidly accumulated from three sources. And the two professional gentlemen united their voices to invite Mr. Buttercup to free that maritime region of his presence, to transfer himself to London or Hades as he preferred, and offered him the alternative of an application of large boots to his neat white flannel trousers.

Mr. Buttercup took one of the two torsades of green stearin which adorned his piano, improvised a candle-stick of a lemonade-bottle, and sadly poured himself a glass of whisky.

A chaplet of pale mother-of-pearl hung from the last fingers of light which still glowed in the west. From scraps of dune and rags of fog the approaching darkness built a city of hypethral temples.

The flame of the green candle wavered here and there, and its tip pointed fearfully at the uncanny shadows which skulked in the corners of the hall.

All at once somebody pushed the door open and with a great sigh sank into one of the rateen armchairs.

MR. BUTTERCUP gazed at the newcomer incredulously.

He found it hard to convince himself that this was not merely another of the shadows which by this time were moving freely about the empty hall; but a second sigh, more piteous than the first, proved to him that the occupant of the

armchair was a human being, a creature of flesh and blood.

The candle did not give light enough to see anything that was more than two steps away. Mr. Buttercup approached the visitor.

"Mr. Windgery!" he exclaimed, very much relieved. "This is a surprize, to be sure!" There was real emotion in his tone, instead of the obsequious correctness which usually characterized this model Boniface. "I thought I saw you going to the station."

"Missed—the train——" the poor fellow panted.

"You certainly tried your best to make it. I saw you running. Good gracious, you're completely winded, aren't you?"

"Lungs"—the man breathed—"very bad shape—lungs attacked—I—thought I had to leave—snow——"

"You're afraid of the snow, too? But it won't snow, I'll guarantee that!"

In lieu of verbal reply, Mr. Windgery lifted a meager, transparent hand toward the darkening windows, and the innkeeper saw little irregular flakes floating down through the gloom.

"Well now," he murmured, "I wouldn't have believed it. But what's the harm if it does snow?"

"Isn't—good—for my—lungs——" groaned the invalid.

"I'll take you back to your villa," said Mr. Buttercup. But the other shook his head.

"I don't want to go. Every room in the villa is empty or locked. I wish I might stay here—if you have a room and a little hot tea."

"Why of course you can!" said Mr. Buttercup hospitably. He had entirely recovered his air of professional business-getter. "Do you want some supper? There's still some cold beef and a corner of meat pie, and some kippered fish, and all the cheese you can eat."

"Thank you. All I want is—some hot tea and two drops of old rum, if you can get it for me."

"Now I'll have company," said Mr. Buttercup, in an extremely good humor. "You see, I was left all alone here in this deserted place. Everybody had moved out—and you were the last. I shouldn't have had a soul to talk to this uncanny October night, with the sea bellowing outside and no living voice to hear but the screaming of the wild geese. It would have been a little lonely and trying for any Christain."

But his new companion was quite as morose as the night. Mr. Buttercup noticed with alarm that when he took his handkerchief away from his mouth, there were great red spots on it. In the meager light of the candle the spots looked black instead of red, as black as shoe-polish, but that did not make the situation any more agreeable.

Finally his guest moaned out a "Good-night" and went upstairs to the room which Mr. Buttercup had offered him, carrying the other green torsade. It wavered like a faint torch in the hands of a drunken helot.

Mr. Buttercup sat alone again, more alone than ever, beside his tiny flame, which had burned down to the neck of the bottle. The whisky tasted bitter to him, and he drank it in great gulps without any pleasure; now and then he cast a furious glance at one of the great wicker easy-chairs, in which his truant fancy had chosen to locate the comfortably sprawling station-master.

But that chair was as empty as all the others, as empty of everything but tortured shadows and the trembling reflection of the snow which shone pale in the darkness.

MR. BUTTERCUP awoke. His flesh was quivering and pricking with terror, but he had not the slightest idea

what caused the feeling. The night was upholstered with snow and silence, and flooded with moonlight. He had fallen asleep grumbling at the tearing, penetrating cough of Mr. Windgery. Now he could hear it no longer.

"He has gone to sleep," he said to himself. But he was unable to explain the sensation of apprehension which made him shrink up into a ball in the warm cavern of the bed-clothes.

The evening before, with its phalanx of shadows, might naturally have seemed more hostile than this noiseless night with its splendid brightness; and yet Mr. Buttercup had not been particularly afraid of the shadows, whereas he was asking himself now, in a strange, thin little voice: "What can be the matter? What can be happening?"

Apparently nothing was happening. The moonlight made the silence more unmistakable. And that was all.

"What in the world can be wrong?" he said aloud again, in the strange, troubled falsetto.

And at that same moment, from the depths of the motionless night, the answer came. It came in the nature of a heavy sound, a sound that awoke no echo, the sound of leaden steps. Somebody was walking through the house, and the steps came one by one, dull, heavy, monotonous.

"Mr. Windgery! Mr. Windgery!" called Mr. Buttercup.

But the only answer was the regular thumping of the steps. They seemed to be coming out of the guest's room and calmly descending the stairs.

The innkeeper reached hurriedly for several garments at random and pulled them on as they happened to come. He was still struggling with a mysterious feeling of terror, which bore down on him like the dark waves of the ocean.

He made a foolish effort to joke with himself:

"Well, I can't complain any longer that I haven't company. First I get Mr. Windgery, and now it seems that I have another guest too."

He leaned over the railing and peered down into the stairway well, but he could see nobody, although the stairs were distinctly visible in a fine white light. Yet he could hear the feet going down the lowest steps.

"Ah!" stammered Mr. Buttercup. "I say, sir—listen, sir—won't you let me see you, please?"

But his voice was finer than the tiniest thread, and he could scarcely push it out beyond his trembling lips.

He made no attempt to call Mr. Windgery any longer. He pulled himself together and started down the stairs.

He could hear the steps crossing the great hall; then, although Mr. Buttercup heard no sound of opening doors or keys turning in locks, they descended the steps into the cellar.

When the innkeeper thought the matter over later, he wondered that it had never occurred to him to provide himself with a weapon.

The sound of the steps died away, and in the silence Mr. Buttercup's courage came back a little and he went down the stairs more confidently. But he went down with such careful precautions that he reminded himself of a robber in his own house. The door of Mr. Windgery's room was not locked, in spite of the warning BOLT YOUR DOOR AT NIGHT which was displayed prominently in three places, and his host was able to open it without making the slightest noise.

The moonlight told Mr. Buttercup at once what the dramatic and terrible thing had been that had happened in that room.

Mr. Windgery lay on the bed, his head buried deep in the pillow and his blackened mouth wide open in an inaudible cry, a cry which seemed never to end, while his wide, staring eyes reflected the blue light from the window.

"Dead!" stammered Mr. Buttercup. "Dead! Good God, what a business!"

Two seconds later he was fleeing madly up the stairs. The steps had suddenly crossed the hall again and were coming up from below.

Mr. Buttercup climbed up and up, driven by abject terror.

He had reached the attic floor, where the employees of the hotel had been lodged. He stumbled over a disorderly mass of debris left by his discontented minions when they were no longer under his supervision. He could hear the steps below, passing from room to room, as if somebody were making a careful tour of inspection.

"It's in Number 12," the innkeeper murmured to himself. "Now it has gone into 18—into 22—good heavens, now it's in my room!"

His heart stopped beating at the thought that the Unknown was going about in the night, moving among the familiar, personal objects which he had left but a moment before; so that it seemed to him that a part of his being adhered still to the contents of the room.

In the last attic room, which two or three of his maids had occupied, he saw standing against the partition a holy-water vase of plaster and a scrap of consecrated boxwood twigs. With a sudden grotesque inspiration, he piled up several small articles in the door, one on top of the other, and crowned the whole with the little basin, which was still moist, and with the withered little branch.

"He'll have to come this way," he mumbled to himself, "and then——"

Mr. Buttercup would have been put to it to explain what impression he had of the personality of this "he".

But he was allowed very little time for reflection and reasoning. The steps had begun to fall heavily on the uncarpeted stairs which led up to the garret rooms.

The sound was more lugubrious and more coldly ferocious than ever. It seemed as if the whole structure were moaning with fear.

"I must go higher yet!" the poor fugitive groaned.

He climbed another flight and stood in the empty, sonorous space under the rafters. He could go no farther. Was this to be the scene of his last agony?

Suddenly, in the darkness, his hand touched a slender metal ladder. He remembered that there was a cupola above, although he had never made any use of it. He struggled panting up the ladder. The trap-door above his head gave way a little, but refused to turn on its hinges stiffened by rust and dirt. The corridor of the attic floor below him echoed to the relentless steps, and they came right past his childish barricade, without an instant's hesitation.

"Even that doesn't stop him!" whispered the innkeeper. And with a desperate push that bruised his head and his hands, he drove the reluctant door wide open and saw above him the boundless blue night, cushioned with snow and studded with stars.

This belvedere was a large platform from which miles of the surrounding country were visible.

It was a new place for Mr. Buttercup. He had climbed on a chair, and his head was turning.

"I'll jump off this place, if necessary," he cried, "rather than let that Thing get me!"

He walked across the thick carpet of snow to the edge of the platform, and

an immense desolation took possession of his heart.

Far away, out on the black vastness of the sea, two lights were moving. And the yellow eye on the pier ogled him insolently from the blackness.

"Yes, that would be better—better——" the plump citizen sobbed.

A creaking of metal made his heart jump. It came from the rusty rungs of the ladder. The Thing was coming nearer and nearer. It had reached the trap.

Then Mr. Buttercup saw before him, shining gently in the light of the moon, the long, firm line of the lightning rod. Seizing it with a hiccup of terror, he clambered over the railing and with a cry like the shriek of a damned soul he slipped out into space.

Something leapt up on the platform.

A PALE streak of light licked the horizon.

Away out in the ash-colored trench which was the railroad, a green light began to appear. The windows of the little station whitened under the cold flame of an acetylene lamp, and the first train whistled lazily in the invisible distance. Mr. Buttercup left the pile of creosoted railroad ties on which he had spent the night, and with creaking bones, bloody hands, and a brain on fire, he staggered toward the little station, lighted and inhabited, which seemed to him the loveliest paradise on earth.

It was not till along toward eleven o'clock in the morning, after having eaten humble-pie and effected a reconciliation with the station-master, and after the physician who had come over on his bicycle from the neighboring village had assured him that Mr. Windgery had died very naturally from his sad affection of the lungs, that Mr. Buttercup ventured back to the hotel.

He found absolutely nothing suspicious there, and he had nearly reached the point of blaming the whole unpleasant affair on his loneliness, his fear and his whisky, when the idea struck him to examine the platform of the belvedere.

Like every good Englishman, like every well-informed citizen of any country for that matter, he had read *Robinson Crusoe;* but it did not occur to him, when he started back in horror at the sight that met his gaze up there, that he was repeating the celebrated gesture of the solitary mariner, when he discovered one morning on the sandy beach of his island a menacing footprint.

For Mr. Buttercup saw beside the marks of his own boots, distinctly printed in the faithful medium of the snow, two strange impressions, hideous, enormously large, which, just like his, continued to the very edge of the platform, and like his never returned, as if the Thing that walked in the night had flown off into the air like some monstrous bird of prey. . . .

Mr. Buttercup stumbled down into the hall again, and cried out with joy when he saw the somber vehicle arrive which was to carry away the mortal remains of poor Mr. Windgery.

He managed to keep the black-clad undertaker's men in play, with whisky and jocular conversation, till his moving-van arrived with its crew. And he promised these last-mentioned individuals such magnificent largess if they should have everything loaded on the van an hour before the last train went through, that the poor fellows came near breaking their own limbs and the furniture in their earnest zeal.

But they did themselves proud, and a full hour before the last train whistled, Mr. Buttercup stood on the platform at the station.

He had brought two bottles of whisky

for the station-master, and that functionary helped him on the train with fraternal tenderness and stood waving farewells to him till the last car was no more than a black speck on the horizon.

At the long table of the Silver Dragon, a substantial tavern in Richmond Road, Mr. Buttercup told the company his story just as they were calling for cards, dice and a checkerboard.

"That's what they call suggestion, auto-suggestion," said Mr. Chickenbread, who has charge of the handsome big music-store next door to the tavern.

"You might call it a hallucination," condescended Bitterstone, who handles oils and linseed cakes.

Mr. Buttercup scratched his chapped face.

"A man doesn't have hallucinations," he replied coldly, "when his—when his name is Buttercup." Then it struck him that he had implied what might be taken as an aspersion on the honorable name of his ancestors, and he added with a touch of self-importance: "And when a man is proprietor of the Ocean Queen Hotel."

The dice rattled, and the fly-specks on cubes of yellow bone made some of the company richer and others poorer.

White disks melted away before the somber onslaughts of black disks on the squares of the checkerboard; a proud king stood dangerously isolated in a neatly enameled No Man's Land. But old Doctor Hellermund sat and thought, very seriously.

"I know," he murmured, rather to himself than to the placid Mr. Buttercup, who had completely regained his composure, "I know that step that paced the hotel. . . .

"For many years I was resident physician in a hospital. I heard that step often in ghastly nights when the air was filled with formalin and the death-agony. It paced round and round in the reddish gloom of the smoke-consumers; it sounded its dull 'tramp—tramp' down the long corridors with their tiny night-lamps. It went ahead of the litters that moved silently out at night when the attendants, with muffled foot-steps, carried their melancholy burdens to the dreary, icy dead-house.

"We all heard it, but there was a silent agreement among all of us—doctors, nurses and attendants—never to mention it. Sometimes we would hear a green hand saying his prayers aloud. But every time that step sounded, we knew that one of the sufferers in that row of terrible white halls had ceased to suffer.

"The gruesome bailiffs in Newgate Prison, as they make ready to hang out when dawn comes the black flag with its capital *N*, hear that step approaching down the stone gallery, and they hear it stop before one dreadful cell which has taken on a ghastliness more terrible than all the other cells."

Old Doctor Hellermund fell silent and began to follow with interest the game of checkers, with his eyes on the board, a bright ocean on which from moment to moment the light raft of a man or the imposing galleon of a king suffered shipwreck.

"Kareef raised his arm in a gesture of deadly menace."

The Carnival of Death

By ARLTON EADIE

A thrilling mystery story of the present day—an eery adventure with a Golden Mummy, and strange death that walked at night

The Story Thus Far

WILMER DENTON, a young American archeologist acting for Lord Mounthead, finds a hidden Egyptian tomb containing rich treasures. Lord Mounthead turns his find over to the Egyptian Government, which allows him to keep the plainest-appearing mummy. When this is unwrapped, it is found to be the mummy of a priest of Anubis, wearing the priest's high regalia of solid gold.

Denton had found the secret tomb by

observing the actions of a mysterious Egyptian, named Kareef, whose groping fingers touched a secret spring that opened a trap-door from the tomb itself into the heretofore unknown mummy chamber.

With fanatic zeal, Kareef warns Denton against despoiling the tomb. And after the Golden Mummy is taken to England, Kareef sends a message to Lord Mounthead threatening him with death unless the mummy is returned to Egypt. Kareef's vengeful figure suddenly appears at Lord Mounthead's dining-room window after an attempt to shoot Denton has failed, and astonishes Lord Mounthead, his wife Thelma (a former actress), his daughter Celia, and Denton.

At dead of night, Lord Mounthead and Denton capture a marauder in the house, who proves to be a Russian named Boris Matrikoff. Matrikoff is obsessed with the belief that Denton's discovery of the Golden Mummy was made possible by a tip from him, and that the mummy therefore is rightfully his.

Meanwhile Denton and Celia have fallen in love with each other. Lady Thelma tries to break up this affair, prompted by Lord Mounthead's secretary, Edwin Lorimer, an unscrupulous blackguard who wants to marry Celia himself and thus gain possession of her fortune. Lorimer holds over Lady Thelma's head the threat to let Lord Mounthead know that she has never been divorced from her first husband, an actor named Claude Delorme, whom she had believed to be dead when she married Lord Mounthead. But Claude Delorme is alive.

The story continues:

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6. *Lorimer Hires a Mime*

THERE is one well-known feature of London's night life which seldom finds mention in the guide-books.

Toward dusk on any week-day night—provided that the weather is not too inclement—long ranks of people may be seen drawn up in orderly array on one side of the pavement, some seated on camp-stools, some standing; some reading, some smoking, but the main part engaged in no discernible occupation whatever.

Their seemingly sad and wearisome vigil is, strangely enough, the prelude to their evening's amusement; for each orderly rank is but the queue which stretches from the door of the pit or gallery of the various theaters, prospective patrons of musical comedy or the drama patiently awaiting the time when they will be permitted to pay their money and enter.

The hour of its assembling varies with the popularity of the dramatic fare provided by the particular theater. A devoted vanguard have been known to take up strategic positions on the previous night. This, of course, was on an exceptional first night, but a wait of two or three hours is nothing unusual. Incidentally the queues provide a livelihood to quite a number of people: the men who loan out camp-stools for a small fee, the venders of chocolates and cigarettes, newspapers and periodicals. And last, but not least, there are the itinerant curbstone entertainers who reap a harvest of coppers by relieving the tedium of waiting by the various "turns."

Most of them are well-known figures of the London streets. Conjurers, contortionists, jugglers, musicians, paper-tearers and singers make their nightly round from theater to theater, and usually there is a broken-down actor who gives an elocutionary display as a preliminary to passing round the hat.

At half-past six on a wet April night, just twenty-four hours after Lord Mounthead had shown the safe to Thelma, an

"artist" of this description was exhibiting his talent in a side street off the Haymarket. He presented a figure of down-at-heel dignity as he slowly stalked to the middle of the queue and removed his battered hat with a courtly, Old World sweep.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began in a sonorous, far-reaching voice, "I am an actor, to whom Fate has proved unkind. Years ago, I had the honor of appearing with"—he mentioned the name of a famous actor-manager, now dead—"in all his productions. But now my star has faded from the Firmament of Fame. I am forced to exhibit my histrionic art in the streets—in the gutter, if you will."

He placed his hand upon his breast and threw up his head with the air of an emperor.

"But allow me respectfully to remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that some of the greatest stars on our stage today were once in the same position that I am in tonight."

He paused for a moment as though to allow his words to sink into the minds of his hearers; then:

"My repertoire is varied and extensive, but with the limited time at my disposal I shall only be able to perform one or two items. But if any lady or gentleman will be obliging enough to suggest a subject, I will recite you anything from Shakespeare to Shaw, or Kipling to Corelli."

He paused again, but, finding that nobody seemed inclined to take advantage of the wide choice offered, he went on:

"As you have not signified any particular predilection, I will give an impersonation of the late Sir Henry Irving in his famous performance of Mathias in *The Bells*."

Thereupon followed what was, under the circumstances, a very fair piece of acting, though the demise of the conscience-stricken innkeeper was marred somewhat by his death-throes having to be cut short in consequence of the comments of a gentleman with an organ, who hinted in terms more pointed than polite that the disciple of Sir Henry was monopolizing more than his fair share of the "stage."

Claude Delorme

THE most interested member of the audience was Edwin Lorimer, as he stood half concealed in a doorway on the opposite side of the road. He waited until the actor had passed the hat round and departed; then he followed and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"What about a drink, Sir Henry?" he inquired genially.

The actor hesitated.

"It will have to be a quick one," he answered. "I have to do another two theaters before the doors open."

Lorimer slipped a pound note into his hand.

"Maybe this will compensate you for your lost time," he said with a smile. "I want to have a talk with you. I think I can put you in the way of earning an easy fifty pounds."

The actor stared at him in surprize. Then his eyes lit up beneath their heavy brows, as he motioned toward the door of a saloon they were passing.

"That sounds good to me," he said in a voice very different from his grandiloquent stage utterances.

Edwin Lorimer

Edwin Lorimer ordered drinks, and in a secluded corner of the almost deserted lounge at once plunged into business.

"Do you think you would be able to impersonate an American?" he asked.

"Any particular American?"

"Yes. A friend of mine."

The actor took a pull at his glass and laughed.

"I see—you're thinking of playing a practical joke?"

"Something of that sort," Lorimer returned guardedly. "Do you think you could do it?"

The other man took another drink and shrugged his threadbare shoulders.

"That depends on his build," he said. "Of course I can't turn myself into a six-footer——"

"Don't worry about that," Lorimer interrupted eagerly. "It's only his voice that I want you to imitate."

"Then I'm your man. There isn't a man living whose voice I can't mimic. I can impersonate every star——"

"I know—I've been listening to you outside the different theaters, and I shouldn't have approached you if I had not been sure of your skill in that line."

"I'll have to have a good look at this fellow, and hear him talk, so's to get hold of any little mannerisms and tricks of speech."

"I'll arrange for you to overhear at least an hour's conversation at my rooms," said Lorimer easily. "Your little speech—which I shall write out for you, by the way—will not take twenty minutes, and I'm offering you fifty pounds. Is it a deal?"

The actor slowly drained his glass and set it down. Then he favored Lorimer with a searching look.

"Of course, I know the game you're playing is crooked—you wouldn't be offering that fee else," he said shrewdly. "The question is: Is it crooked enough to get me a lagging if it goes wrong?"

Edwin Lorimer made a motion of eager denial.

"I assure you that no law in this country can touch you, even if the scheme goes wrong—which it can't do if you're half as clever as I think you are," he added hastily.

"What is the scheme?"

"I want you to imitate the voice of a man named Wilmer Denton, and in that voice make love to the wife of Lord Mounthead. The lady herself is an experienced actress, so you need have no fear that she will fail to play her part. If you need a rehearsal——"

"Tush, laddie," smiled the actor, rising to his feet and stroking back his curly hair with a complacent smile. "A man of my wide experience does not require any rehearsals in making love."

In response to a very pointed hint from his new ally, Lorimer handed over two pound notes, as earnest money for their villainous bargain. Whereupon they parted, each very satisfied with his night's work. It was only when he reached home that Lorimer realized that he had neglected to ask the stranger's name.

"After all, what does it matter?" He dismissed his oversight with a careless shrug. "I don't suppose his name would convey much to me—even if he gave his real one."

But in this matter the clever Edwin Lorimer was very much mistaken.

7. *The Golden Mummy Speaks*

It was a week later, and Wilmer Denton was busily engaged in examining some rolls of ancient papyri that Lord Mounthead had recently purchased, when there came a light tap on the door.

"Celia!" A moment later the eager smile faded from his face. "I'm sorry I

can't ask you in. You know how particular your father is that nobody but myself should enter his museum. Of course I just hate to keep you out——"

"But you're not keeping me out!" she laughed as she stepped across the threshold. "I've been worrying Daddy to let me have a peep at his precious mummy, and at last he has said that I may. So you are to show it to me, because he is too busy talking to a queer-looking old man with a name as strange as himself—Professor Artemus Figg!"

The young investigator nodded.

"I've heard of Professor Figg," he said slowly. "I believe he is a little wrong in his head, for he firmly believes that it is possible to restore your father's Golden Mummy to life!"

He turned and unlocked another door, and together they passed into the room where the more valuable objects of the collection were kept.

"How wonderful — and yet how weird!" Celia's voice was little more than a whisper.

Wilmer laughed and a slight flush of gratification showed on his good-looking features.

Celia grasped his arm suddenly as she cast a nervous glance at the huge sarcophagus which stood at the farther end of the apartment.

"Could the mummy wake?" She said the words with a shudder. "Surely you do not think such a thing possible?"

He caught her in his arms and gave her a reassuring hug.

"Why, of course not, you silly darling," he laughed. "I guess there's no need for you to get nervy. The old gentleman is sure-enough dead."

Her answering laugh was a trifle quavering.

"I know it's very silly of me, Wilmer, but for a moment I thought you were in earnest—about the mummy waking up, you know. Your words reminded me of something I'd read—yes, it was an interview in the *Evening Orb*, giving the views of the same Professor Figg, who is with Daddy at the present moment. He said that he held the theory that some of the priests of ancient Egypt were not dead at all—only in a state of trance, from which they could be awakened by administering a certain drug. He said he was hoping to discover that drug, and that he would never rest content until he had brought the Golden Mummy back to life."

Celia Mounthead

"I call it real unkind of him!" rejoined Wilmer, in a tone of mock despair. "What is to become of a poor hard-working Egyptologist like me if they start in to resuscitate mummies? Who will pay us salaries for slowly and painfully reconstructing the history of the past if they can get their information red-hot from the lips of a man who lived at the time? I reckon it's playing real low-down for old Figgy to start importing his native labor to spoil our jobs, and I'd denounce him to the Egyptologists' Trade Union—if there was such a body. My only consolation is the strong suspicion that the worthy Professor Figg has bats in his belfry."

"You think he is mad?"

"On the subject of mummies, I certainly do," Wilmer answered with conviction. "Now, tell me, did you ever

Wilmer Denton

see anything or anybody less likely to wake up than this?"

She gave a suppressed exclamation as he pressed down a switch and flooded the interior of the massive sarcophagus with brilliant light from an electric globe suspended immediately above. She had come prepared to see something out of the ordinary, yet she was wholly unprepared for the sight which actually met her astonished eyes.

WITHIN the stone coffin was an inner shell of carved wood, heavily gilded and painted with many-colored figures of the gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt; and inside this, lying full length, its hands held stiffly at its sides, was the mummy of the former High Priest of Anubis. To her surprize, there was nothing horrible, nothing sinister, nothing even suggestive of the grimness of the grave about it. For the actual mummy was hidden from sight, being covered from head to foot with thin plates of gold cunningly adapted to its form without visible break. Upon its head was a mask of beaten gold, surmounted by the usual type of Egyptian head-dress, which, extending down to each shoulder, lent an air of sphinx-like dignity to the thin, aquiline features of the mask itself.

Adorning the figure, and entirely distinct from its golden covering, were several articles of jewelry which flashed back a thousand many-hued fires in the light of the electric globe. Upon the brow was a magnificent diadem in the shape of a double-headed asp, the heads of the diamond-studded reptiles meeting, twined, on the forehead; their heads reared aloft with bared fangs as though threatening death to any who dared profane the sacred mummy. Lying on the breast was a splendid *pectrum,* or breastplate, formed of concentric rows of diamonds and emeralds. A girdle of the same precious stones encircled the waist, while similarly encrusted armlets and anklets decorated the arms and legs. Nor was this all. By its side rested a scepter of gold surmounted by a huge ruby carved into a representation of Anubis, the jackal-headed god of death; while suspended from the girdle was a straight-bladed dagger, whose hilt and sheath blazed with gems.

For a full minute Celia stood gazing at the mass of gold and jewels in silence. Then she turned her wondering eyes to the man who had discovered it.

"This must be very valuable," she said in a low voice.

Wilmer Denton shrugged.

"One cannot put a price on such things, for the simple reason that they are priceless. But, apart from its antiquarian value, the intrinsic value of the gold and jewels would reach many thousands of pounds, even if the metal were melted down and the jewels prized from their settings. The Egyptian Government has actually offered your father a quarter of a million pounds if he will restore it to them. I will not go so far as to say that its actual value is as great as that; but it is obvious that the authorities are very keen to regain possession of the treasure they allowed to slip through their fingers."

The girl looked puzzled.

"If they wanted it, why did they present it to Daddy?" she asked, with a slight lifting of her eyebrows.

"They did so in ignorance of what was inside the sarcophagus. As a matter of fact, this coffin was the plainest of the lot, and they assumed (as I did myself) that it belonged to a mere doorkeeper, or some other minor official of the temple. They were just too mad for words

when they got to know what was really inside."

Celia nodded her head and turned and again examined the Golden Mummy. Suddenly she looked around.

"Has the mummy been unwrapped?"

"Not yet," he told her.

"Then how can you be sure that it is a human body at all? It might be just a statue—an effigy."

"No chance of that, Celia."

Wilmer Denton went into the next room and almost immediately returned with a large card in his hand.

"This is an X-ray photograph of the mummy," he said, handing it to her. "It proves, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that there is a body inside—and a remarkably well-preserved one, too. I have often urged your father to remove the golden covering to examine the mummy beneath, but he has always turned down my suggestion."

"Why?"

The American shrugged.

"Lord Mounthead would never give his reason, but his decision is quite understandable. There is always a great risk in exposing to the air objects which have been sealed up for thousands of years. As soon as we pierced that metal covering, the body inside might crumble into dust before our eyes——"

"Or it might come to life before your eyes!" cried a shrill, cracked voice. "The Golden Mummy might not be so very dead, after all!"

Celia faced round at the unexpected interruption. But Wilmer merely smiled as he nodded to the old man who stood leering at them from the doorway.

"Hullo, Professor Figg," Wilmer greeted him. "How long has it been considered good manners in your set to play hide-and-seek in other folk's houses?"

Professor Figg looked somewhat abashed at the rebuke. He was a man of about seventy years of age, and his outward appearance was as eccentric as his scientific theories were grotesque. His head resembled a pear in its general outline, the broad part being represented by his bald pate, and the narrow end by his sunken, clean-shaven cheeks. His tall, spare figure appeared even more elongated by the tightly buttoned frock coat of a bygone fashion, and the high silk hat which he had not troubled to remove.

Kareef

"I am most sorry to have intruded," he said, with an elaborate bow, "but I was so excited by the wonderful discovery that I have made that it is scarcely surprizing that I failed to observe the conventions of polite society. Early this morning I produced in my laboratory a drug whose effects will amaze the whole world!"

"Indeed?" Denton shot a quick glance at the professor's working features, noting how his eyes were glittering with feverish excitement. "May I ask the manner in which you propose to make use of your discovery?"

Professor Artemus Figg drew his lean figure up to its fullest height as he extended his hand toward the motionless figure which lay in the granite sarcophagus.

"By the aid of this drug I will restore the Golden Mummy to life!" he declared dramatically.

A LONG silence followed. Sheer stupefaction at his amazing words held his hearers dumb. Then through the stillness, floating faintly to their ears from some point in the grounds outside,

came a weird, long-drawn howling. The old man clutched Wilmer's arm.

"Don't you hear it?" he wheezed. "It's the jackal-cry of the followers of Anubis! It is their signal. They are watching—there is no time to be lost. Are you armed?"

Wilmer nodded as he tapped his pocket significantly.

"Then let's be going——"

"Stay!"

A tall, white-robed figure stood at the door, barring their egress. It was Kareef, his arms folded across his breast, his glittering eyes fixed on the young American.

With a movement so swift that the eye could not follow, Wilmer drew his automatic and took careful aim.

"Hands up, Kareef!" he ordered crisply. "I've got you now. The game is up as far as you're concerned."

A low, defiant laugh burst from the lips of the Egyptian, but he did not change his attitude.

"Listen to me, Wilmer Denton," he said in his slow, sibilant accents. "I come to warn you. I warned you once in the Valley of the Kings, even when I held you covered with my weapon as you are covering me now. I warned you against interfering with forces which you little understand. I warned you that sorrow and death would dog your footsteps if you despoiled the sacred temple of my ancestors. And that warning I repeat!"

With a slow, almost majestic movement, Kareef raised his arms above his head. But it was not an act of submission; rather was it one of deadly menace.

"Hear me, Wilmer Denton, before your folly brings upon your head the fate which even now hovers above you like a poised hawk. Even now it is not too late. Undo the evil you have brought about. Persuade Lord Mounthead to restore the mummy of this holy priest of Anubis to the Land of Khem, and all may yet be well with you and with this house."

"And if I refuse?" queried Wilmer, resting his pistol on the crook of his left arm, but never for a moment taking his eyes off the figure of the Egyptian.

"Then death shall be your portion—a death shameful and ignominious. You shall die shunned and reviled, your name a byword of infamy in the mouths of your fellow-men!"

He seemed to grow even taller as he uttered the words with a solemnity that almost convinced his hearers against their better judgment. He seemed to divine their thoughts, for he went on.

"You half believe me, yet not wholly. But I will convince you that I speak no idle words. Out of the mouth of the dead shall you be convinced!"

The man closed his dark, hypnotic eyes and for a moment seemed to commune with his thoughts. Then he opened them again and fixed his gaze on the granite sarcophagus in which reposed the Golden Mummy.

"Speak, O Priest of Anubis!" he cried in his shrill, piercing voice. "What shall be the fate of Wilmer Denton should he refuse to harken to my counsel?"

He paused expectantly, and a deep silence pervaded the vault-like room—a silence tense and death-like, such as precedes the first crash of thunder during a storm—a hush so complete that Wilmer could hear the ticking of his watch and count the pulsing of his own heart.

Then from the direction of the mummy there came the sound of a voice. It was deep and muffled, rolling as though it had traversed miles of subterranean tunnels before it broke on their startled ears:

"Death!" it said.

A low, strangled scream burst from Celia. Wilmer turned and caught her limp form as she fell forward in a faint.

Lady Thelma

Leaving the girl to the care of the old Professor, Wilmer dashed through the door, pistol in hand. But although he searched every inch of the corridors and adjacent rooms, Kareef, the Egyptian, had vanished as completely as if he had dissolved into thin air.

8. *The Trap Is Sprung*

IN HER own mind Lady Thelma had not the slightest doubt that she was confronted with a situation of extreme difficulty. The slightest hitch in the carrying out of Lorimer's scheme would involve her in explanations that would be most difficult to make plausible to a man as shrewd as Lord Mounthead. She would never have consented to the plan had she not been certain that it alone could save her from social and financial ruin—save her from standing in the dock charged with bigamy. For at the time of her marriage to the wealthy Lord Mounthead, Thelma was already the wife of a struggling actor who went by the name of Claude Delorme.

She had never been able to understand how Edwin Lorimer had come to hear about her marriage, for it had taken place at the local registrar's at a small town in the North of England, long before she had become the famous star she was when she had attracted the notice of Lord Mounthead. But the investigation which had led to Lorimer's discovery was nothing more complicated than a search in the old files of *The Stage*, and a subsequent journey north to verify the entry in the marriage register. When, from the same source, he had learnt that at the time of her wedding Claude Delorme was touring South Africa with a repertory company, his chain of evidence was complete. The private secretary had the wife of his employer absolutely in his power.

At first Lorimer's object had been merely blackmail, but gradually his plans had grown wider and more ambitious. A little prying into Mounthead's private papers had revealed the fact that Celia Mounthead would, on her marriage, inherit the large sum of money which had been bequeathed to her by her uncle, Mounthead's younger brother. Assured of Lady Thelma's support—no inconsiderable factor, as he knew—he had lost no time in endeavoring to make a good impression on the young and pretty heiress. The advent of Wilmer Denton, and the fact that Lord Mounthead openly favored the young American's suit, had dashed his hopes. But, such was the man's natural vanity and self-confidence, he felt sure that he had but to remove his rival from his path to win an easy conquest and a comfortable fortune at one and the same time.

Eager as he was to see his rival discredited and disgraced, Lorimer was far too cunning to risk failure until he had thoroughly rehearsed and matured his ingenious plot. Well enough he knew that if he bungled there would be but small chance of his being able to repeat the experiment.

Immediately after dinner was over he lit a cigarette and made his way into the grounds by a side door that was little used. He had devoted some little attention to the lock and hinges, and now he noted with satisfaction

Lord Mounthead

that it opened without the slightest sound. Passing through the shrubbery, he approached a small summer-house and coughed three times, and at the pre-arranged signal a dark figure emerged from the tiny rustic door and silently approached.

"All ready?" Lorimer asked the question scarcely above his breath.

"Bet your life I am," came the slow, drawling answer, so like the tones of Wilmer Denton's voice that Lorimer, prepared though he was, gave a gasp of surprize.

"You'll do!" he whispered in a tone of unfeigned admiration, clapping his actor confederate on the shoulder. "Just keep that up, and there will be no question of failure. I suppose you've studied your part all right?"

"I should worry," was the answer, given in the same feigned voice; and Edwin Lorimer mentally congratulated himself on the lucky chance that had thrown the unscrupulous character actor across his path.

Without another word the two men moved cautiously toward the house.

MEANWHILE, Lady Thelma was carrying out her share of the scheme. Following her husband to his study, she had, after thoroughly arousing his curiosity by various vague hints and half-uttered confidences, leveled an accusation against the young American.

"I did not like to tell you when we were talking on the subject before, John," she said brokenly. "But now his conduct is such that I feel I must speak—if only in justice to you, dear. I feel that I cannot allow your generous, trusting nature to be abused by a man who seeks to ruin both your happiness and my own."

Lord Mounthead laid down his pen and stared at his wife in undisguised amazement.

"My dear Thelma," he said soothingly, taking her slim hand in his. "Whatever are you talking about? *Who* is seeking to ruin your happiness?"

"Wilmer Denton—the man you trust with a faith that is misplaced!" In spite of her self-control, Thelma could not repress the venomous glint which came into her eyes. But the old man was too perturbed and astonished to notice a detail of that kind.

"Surely you must be mistaken, Thelma," he told her gently. "I know that Wilmer has no great liking for you——"

"Indeed?" she flashed back, with something like a sneer. "What would you say if you knew that he had more liking than respect for me?"

His face darkened suddenly at her words and his grip tightened on her hand. "What do you mean?" he asked sternly.

She turned away, lifting her white shoulders in a tiny shrug.

"What is the use of telling you, when you will not hear a word against this wonderful paragon of all the virtues—as you suppose him to be? What is the use of my trying to open your eyes to the real character of the man? You will only smile and set my words down to prejudice, or spite! I'd best say nothing."

The old man stood up suddenly, his bushy gray brows drawn into a hard frown of puzzled anger.

"No, Thelma. You have either said too much or too little." He was thoroughly roused now, as she had intended him to be. "You've hinted at something regarding the conduct of young Denton. You've got to put those hints into plain language here and now!"

She sank into her chair, hiding her face in her hands.

"Wilmer Denton has been . . . making love to me."

Mounthead started as if he had been stung.

"Wilmer? Impossible! I can't believe it!"

She looked up, her eyes filled with the expression of surprized innocence that she knew so well how to assume.

"I knew you would accuse me of falsehood—that is why I hesitated to speak. Oh, John, John!" She threw herself into his arms, clinging to him like a frightened child. "Save me from this man—protect me from the daily insults which he offers me! Spare me the pain of having to listen to his words of love—his sneers at you—his importunities for me to leave you——"

"Leave me? Wilmer has urged you to leave me?" He seemed almost stunned by the revelation. "No, no! This must be some horrible mistake. Never will I credit that Wilmer has been guilty of such black-hearted treachery!"

"Would you believe the evidence of your own ears?" she asked with an eagerness which she did not attempt to disguise.

"Of course."

"Then come with me." She caught his arm and led him to the door. "Wilmer Denton has asked me to grant him an interview in the conservatory, so that he can make one last appeal to induce me to leave you. Naturally, I should not have met him; but now, so that you may be convinced of his utter worthlessness, I will go to him, so that you may have irrefutable proof."

LORD MOUNTHEAD allowed himself to be led into the corridor. Thelma paused at a window, guarded with an ornamental trellis-work of iron. Had her husband been less dazed by her revelation he might have found time to wonder why it should be standing half open. It might also have struck him as somewhat strange that Wilmer should choose a meeting-place so conveniently situated for the purpose of being overheard, considering the many opportunities he had of talking to Lady Thelma during the course of the day. But he was now too agitated—too eager to see the outcome of the black business to take heed of anything but Thelma's whispered words.

"Stand here. Listen, and be convinced!"

The next moment she had glided from his side, leaving him alone in the darkness. Still suspecting that his wife's words must have been the outcome of some hideous mistake, he pressed his face against the iron grille and strove to pierce the gloom below. The only light which entered the conservatory was the faint reflection of the moonlit sky, which, entering through the glass roof, threw deep shadows amid the palms and tree-ferns. He gave a sudden start as he made out the dim outline of a man standing directly below him. In height and build he was similar to Wilmer Denton, and Mounthead naturally assumed that it was he. A second later a slim, white-clad figure joined him, and at the first sound of the man's greeting all Mounthead's doubts vanished.

"You are late, Thelma," said the slow, deliberate voice that Mounthead knew so well. "I was just beginning to opine that you'd decided to stick to the straight and narrow trail."

"Maybe I have," said Thelma in the same low tone.

The note of self-confident insolence in the man's answering laugh sent a hot, angry flush to the face of the listener above.

"Aw, quit handing out that moving-picture stuff," sneered the sham American. "You don't think that I'm goop enough to believe that you really love

that bald-headed old money-bag? Say, Thelma, what was the attraction—the coronet or the dollars? Heaven knows, you've paid dearly for it, whatever it was. How you manage to endure that pompous old bindle-stiff fairly gets me."

The girl drew herself up with an assumption of anger.

"Not another word, sir!" she said in a voice of reproof. "You are insulting my husband——"

"Don't I know it? But there's no need for you to lose sleep over that unfortunate union. Come away with me, to the land where divorce is kinda easy. There's a boat sailing from Southampton tomorrow——"

She stopped him with a gesture.

"Your words are an insult to me, Mr. Denton," she said in a freezing tone. "Have you forgotten that you have been paying your attentions to my stepdaughter?"

"Oh, Celia," drawled the man. "I should have thought a woman of your discernment would have known that a man like me wouldn't fall for such a half-baked, milk-and-water, schoolroom miss. Of course, I was only after her money. But it is you that I love—you, Thelma!"

"Help! Help!" she cried loudly.

The next instant all was confusion. Lord Mounthead, as the plotters had anticipated he would do, immediately quitted his post at the open window and rushed downstairs to the assistance of his wife, who seemed to be struggling in the grip of her attacker. The real Wilmer Denton—whom Lorimer had been careful to hold in conversation in a room near by while this scene was being enacted, heard the cry, too, and lost no time in hurrying into the conservatory. By this time the actor had made his escape in the darkness, and all that Wilmer could see was the white figure of Lady Thelma standing alone.

"What has happened——" he began, his voice dying away in surprize as the girl suddenly threw her arms about him, holding him fast and redoubling her screams for help.

For one moment he thought she had taken leave of her senses; but he was soon to learn that there was sinister method in her seeming madness.

There came a sudden blaze of light as the electrics were switched on. A voice, thick with rage, sounded close at hand.

"You hound! You infernal villain!" Mounthead sprang at the American and seized him by the shoulders. "I refused to believe your treachery at first, but now my own ears have convinced me."

WILMER DENTON could only stand and stare at the furious old man, who was shaking him to and fro.

"Here, what's the big idea?" he managed to gasp out at length.

"Don't bandy words with me!" shouted Mounthead, white with passion. "Get out of my house, and never presume to set foot in it again!"

The American stood like a man stunned. Then he turned to Lady Thelma with a helpless gesture.

"Has everybody gone crazy?" he cried. "What has happened, and what am I being accused of, anyway?"

Lord Mounthead uttered a harsh laugh as he turned away with contempt.

"It is useless for you to try to brazen it out," he said sternly. "You will see that such a course is useless when you know that the 'bald-headed old bindle-stiff' was listening to every word you uttered to his wife."

Wilmer Denton's eyes hardened as a light began to dawn on his confused mind.

"When was this?" he demanded quickly.

"You know well enough. It was just before Thelma screamed out when you attempted to kiss her."

"I?" cried Wilmer indignantly. "Why, I was talking to Mr. Lorimer in the smoking-room for quite ten minutes before that happened. Isn't that so?" And he turned to the secretary for confirmation of his assertion.

Edwin Lorimer lifted his shoulders in an elaborate shrug.

"I fail to understand what you mean, Mr. Denton," he said coldly. "I came straight from my room on hearing her ladyship cry for help."

Wilmer's jaw stiffened.

"Lie number one!" he said grimly. "I'm getting real curious to know just how elaborate this frame-up is. Lady Thelma," he went on, turning to the girl, "you will be able to set your husband right about the stupid mistake he is making. Please tell him who the man was who molested you."

Triumph and hatred glittered in Thelma's eyes as she looked the speaker full in the face.

"It was you!" she said deliberately.

For a moment the American seemed to stagger under the very audacity of the accusation. Then another grim smile broke the stern line of his lips.

"Lie number two!" was his only comment.

Mounthead stepped forward.

"This has gone far enough!" he rapped out angrily. "Heaping insults on my wife and friend will not help you. I, myself, heard you urging her to elope with you!"

Wilmer Denton gave a mirthless laugh.

"And that—though I hate to have to say it to your lordship—is lie number three, and the biggest one of the bunch!"

The veins stood out purple on the old man's face.

"Get out of this house!" he roared, "before I ring for the servants to throw you out!"

"Oh, don't trouble to do that. I hold no grudge against your menials, and some of them might get hurt. I'm going now, of my own accord."

He looked back when he reached the door, and there was a glint in his gray eyes which made the two plotters vaguely uneasy, in spite of the success that had crowned their efforts.

"*Au revoir,* folks!" Wilmer called back with ominous emphasis. "I shan't say 'good-bye,' because some of you have by no means seen the last of me! I've a kinda hankering to get even with those nice people who have planted this little frame-up on me. Get that, everybody? And listen here"—he fixed his eyes on Lady Thelma with a look which made her quail—"I *will* get even with them, if it takes me the rest of my life to do it!"

The words were uttered in the first flush of the natural anger of a man smarting under an unjust accusation. By them he simply meant that he was determined to clear his name at all costs, and win the girl of his heart in spite of the machinations of those who had disgraced him in the eyes of her father.

But they were words that were destined to be remembered and repeated; words which subsequently became of tremendous import, capable of tilting the beam against him at a time when the scales of justice were trembling in the balance to decide whether he should live or die.

9. A Voice from the Past

"GOOD-NIGHT, Thelma. Do not wait up for me. This wretched business has made me waste time that I could ill

afford to lose. I have some important papers to examine, and I shall be working late in my study."

Lord Mounthead took his wife's slender white hand in his own and patted it affectionately. Shrewd man of business though he was, and the director of a newspaper combine which swayed the opinions of millions of readers, it was no mere figure of speech which described him as 'a power in the land.' Yet this modern colossus was completely beneath the sway of the scheming adventuress whom he had made his wife.

He looked at her anxiously as he held her hand in his.

"Why, Thelma, what is the matter? Your hand is deathly cold, and you are trembling." His tone grew angry as he went on. "Are you troubled by the threat of that scoundrel Denton? You need not be; I'll see to it that he never enters this house again."

"No, no, John, dear. It is not that," she whispered in a tone that was in itself a caress. "Of course, I feel happier now that that dreadful man has gone. But I feel run down, and I have a frightful headache. But, really, I am very happy now to think that nobody can come between us, dear."

He smiled as he kissed her tenderly.

"Good-night, Thelma. A sound sleep will see you your own sweet self again. Forget that such a person as Wilmer Denton ever existed."

In spite of the complete triumph of her plot, there was a frown on Lady Thelma's forehead as she made her way up the wide oak staircase to her room. Her mind was filled with a vague but persistent sense of impending calamity. But whatever may have been the cause of the feeling which oppressed her, it was in no part due to any emotion of remorse for the part she had played in the tragic farce which had been enacted in the conservatory that night, or of pity for the man whose reputation had been blasted by it.

Dismissing her maid with a curt word, she slipped on a wrap of pale blue silk and white, downy fur, and seated herself at the dressing-table gazing with unseeing eyes at her reflection in the long mirror. But her thoughts were far away from the dainty furniture and luxurious decorations which surrounded her. In imagination she was back amid the scenes of her early life.

Thelma Delorme had been, in theatrical parlance, "born in the buskin." Her parents had been members of a traveling "fit-up" company, which means a company that visits the small towns and villages that have no regular theater; the stage and proscenium, in addition to the usual scenery and properties, being carried about from place to place and erected in a public hall, corn exchange, or any other building capable of "holding money" which happens to be available.

Three night stands, two shows a night, and a change of program at each performance were strenuous work, but the wide experience it gave proved invaluable in Thelma's subsequent career. At the age of twenty she had played more parts than fall to the lot of the ordinary actress during the whole of her lifetime. It was this experience, no less than her beauty, that secured her entry into the company of a former famous London producer. But, long before she had arrived at the metropolis, she had become the wife of Claude Delorme.

The frown between her curved brows deepened as her thoughts reached this stage. She stretched out her hand and took a perfumed cigarette from the casket beside her, striking a match with a quick, impatient jerk. Why should she

think of him at such a time as this? Why, indeed? She asked herself the question idly—contemptuously—as she watched the spirals of smoke curling upward. Why think of the man who had deserted her—the waster and drunkard who had (she told herself) ensnared her girlish fancy at a time when she did not realize what love really meant? Still, what trick of memory had brought the man back so vividly to her tonight?

"I'm getting fanciful," she muttered, half aloud. "The man is dead to me—probably dead in actual truth. I have nothing to fear from him!"

SHE rose to her feet and put out her hand to switch off the light, only to stand with hand outstretched as silent and motionless as though she had been frozen into stone.

The curtains which shrouded one of the windows had been bunched up by an invisible hand, and through the opening above, a single human eye—dark, fierce, unwinking—was watching her every movement.

For a full minute she remained in the same position, her mind a prey to a thousand fears. Then, dragging her eyes from the baleful glare which seemed to be slowly hypnotizing her, she stumbled toward the bell that would summon help. But ere her fingers could press the ivory button, a grip of iron descended on her wrist, while another hand stifled the scream that rose to her lips.

The next moment she felt herself flung on the bed. She closed her eyes, expecting death. Instead, she heard a low, mocking laugh issue from the lips of the man who held her helpless.

"Saying your prayers, Thelma?" he gibed. "Guess it's time!"

At the sound of the slowly drawled words all the breath seemed to go out of her body in a single gasp. She shuddered from head to foot. A death-like giddiness benumbed her brain.

For the voice was that of Wilmer Denton—the man she had that night ruined!

After what seemed to her to be hours of agonized suspense, she felt the hand which covered her mouth removed.

"Get up," said the voice of Wilmer Denton. "And remember, if you call for help you won't live long enough to see that help arrive. We've got to have a little talk, Thelma, you and I."

She opened her eyes slowly and looked at the masked face which bent over her.

"Have you come to . . . kill me?" she asked in a voice so hoarse and unnatural that she scarcely recognized it as her own.

The masked man shook his head, and his shoulders lifted in a slight shrug.

"When I felt your pretty little windpipe between my fingers I was strongly tempted to give it a squeeze," he said with cool deliberation. "But I resisted the temptation. Revenge is an expensive amusement, Thelma, and I felt you would be more valuable to me alive than dead."

She struggled into a sitting position. For a moment sheer amazement overrode her fear.

"What is it you want?" she demanded in a slightly bolder tone. "If I were to give you a written confession of the whole plot——"

"I guess I can worry along without your confession," the other interrupted roughly.

"Is it money, then?" Her lips curled contemptuously as she asked the question.

"You've said it!" came the quick answer. "Hand over all you have handy, and make it snappy!"

She pointed to her gold-meshed bag on the table, and he seized it and turned out the contents.

"H'm, not much," he commented,

coolly pocketing the notes and silver. "I'll call round for the rest tomorrow."

She gave a gasp of incredulity at his words. She had but to telephone to the police in the morning and Wilmer Denton would be ruined more irrevocably than ever. The man seemed to sense what was passing in her mind.

"Yes, I'd be a first-class fool to run my head into the trap you'd have set for me —that is, if I were really Wilmer Denton. As it happens, I'm not!"

Something in his changed tone made her look at him more narrowly. A new fear clutched her heart like a hand of ice.

"Who are you?" she whispered hoarsely.

Without a word he tore the mask from his face, and Thelma Mounthead sank back with a sob of despair. In a flash she understood all. Now she realized why the mere proximity of the man who had impersonated the American in the darkened conservatory had awakened in her such poignant memories of the past. By an irony of fate, Lorimer had evoked the aid of the very last man who should have been brought into the plot.

The man before her, looking down at her with the hateful, cynical smile she knew so well, was Claude Delorme—her legal husband!

10. Kareef Again

WILMER DENTON was not in an enviable frame of mind as he drove back to his bachelor rooms in his little two-seater. The baseless accusation had come upon him like a bombshell. The whole affair was so fantastic, so impossible, so utterly absurd, that more than once he felt inclined to put the events of that night down to some horrible waking dream. Yet it was real enough. He had, practically speaking, been thrown out of the house by the father of the girl he loved. It certainly looked like the end of his romance. Cupid may be able to laugh at locksmiths, but the little god would find it a tough proposition to deal with an irate father who was fully convinced that his prospective son-in-law had been making violent love to his wife!

Gradually, as he drove through the dark and deserted country roads, their very silence and peacefulness seemed to soothe his troubled mind. The feeling of furious anger passed, giving place to a cool, analytical reasoning. He knew Lord Mounthead well enough to be certain that the old man was sincere in his belief that he had overheard him making love to his wife. How could such an amazing mistake have occurred? Was it due to some subtle plan of the Egyptian, Kareef, to avenge the taking of the sacred Golden Mummy? Was the mysterious being capable of exercising some form of hypnotic suggestion that would convince Lord Mounthead that he had heard something which he had not? The theory was not very convincing; yet, rack his brains as he might, he had failed to think of a more likely explanation by the time he arrived in Lee.

Garaging his car, Wilmer unlocked the door and made his way to the room where he slept. The deserted house appeared cold and cheerless after his more palatial quarters at Mounthead Chase.

He glanced through the few unimportant letters which had accumulated since his last visit. Half-way through the last one, a slight sound made him look up with a sudden intake of breath.

Standing before him, calm and immobile, his arms folded beneath his flowing robe, was Kareef, the Egyptian.

"Hullo!" Wilmer rasped out. "How the devil did *you* get in?"

Kareef raised his shoulders in a shrug which seemed to disregard the question.

"Twice before I have warned you, Wilmer Denton, of what would befall if you refused to aid me in restoring the Golden Mummy to its native land," he said in slow and solemn accents. "Twice you have mocked my warning. But the servants of Anubis are patient. Behold, again am I come to warn you; and now, when the hem of the garment of misfortune has already cast its shadow upon you, it may be that my words will not fall upon deaf ears. Are not my words those of truth? Has not your name been smirched and dishonored in the eyes of your friends? Has not the maiden you love been snatched from your arms?"

A quick flush of anger rose to the face of the American.

"So I am indebted to you for what took place tonight?" he cried.

The other shook his head, a faint smile playing about his thin lips, though the sinister, cat-like eyes never flickered a moment in their steady, wary regard.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Denton. The trap which was laid for you tonight was none of my setting. I am not your enemy —I am merely the instrument of Fate. But you have enemies, nevertheless—powerful, cunning enemies who have brought about the accusation which has driven you from that house."

"You know who they are?" Wilmer cried eagerly. Not for an instant did it occur to him to doubt the truth of the man's statement.

Kareef inclined his head. "I know them."

All the depression dropped from Wilmer as he stepped forward toward this unexpected ally.

"Then you can expose them—clear my name?"

Again the Egyptian made the stately gesture of assent.

"I can . . . at a price!"

Wilmer echoed his words dazedly. Well enough he knew that the price would be one that could not be paid in coin.

"Listen to me!" Kareef's voice had sunk to an eager whisper; his eyes burned like living coals in their hollow sockets. "I swear by the ancient gods of Khem; I swear by Kneph the ram-headed, by Pthah, god of fire; I swear by Isis, divine mother of Anubis; I swear by the mighty Name that must not be spoken by human lips—by all these I swear that you shall regain honor in the eyes of men and shall win the maiden of your desire if you will restore to me the sacred corpse which you call the Golden Mummy."

DENTON shook his head with a bitter laugh.

"You ask impossibilities," he said.

"Not so." Kareef was shaking with suppressed excitement. "Have you forgotten that you still have the keys of the museum?—that you know the customs of the house?—that you could find your way in the darkness to the room where the mummy lies? Have you forgotten that in a few nights' time a great festival will be held at Mounthead Chase, a carnival to which men and women will go dressed in strange garments, and each disguised?"

"You mean the fancy-dress ball?" cried Wilmer, as he caught the drift of the man's meaning.

"Even so," nodded Kareef. "Many will be there with their faces hidden by masks. Why not mingle with them, and while the dancing is at its height slip away and enter the museum? I would be awaiting you there. The rest would be easy."

"Easy?" To say that Wilmer was amazed would be to describe his feelings mildly. "Why, my dear, simple-minded, chuckle-headed son of the desert, don't you realize it would be a trifle easier to

walk away with the crown jewels from the Tower of London than to attempt to carry a dead body through a crowded ballroom?"

The white teeth of the Egyptian showed in an unexpected smile.

"There will be no need to carry him. He will walk."

"Eh?" Wilmer Denton doubted that he had heard aright.

"The Golden Mummy is not dead," explained Kareef with the air of one who states a quite ordinary fact. "Let me but spend the space of an hour alone with him and I will awaken him from the trance in which he has slept for centuries."

Wilmer gave a skeptical grin as he shook his head.

"Yes, and if I left you alone with him for the space of half an hour, Lord Mounthead could say good-bye to the portable jewelry which decorates the mummy! No, my ingenious Egyptian, your tale of a living dead man strikes me as being a trifle too thin. As a novel form of the perennial confidence trick your little plan has its points, but as a business proposition it leaves me cold. So ring off, sonny—you're on the wrong number."

Kareef shook his head. The snappy idiom of the American was evidently beyond his comprehension.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I mean there's nothing doing. Get me?" Wilmer pointed eloquently to the door. "Lay off—beat it—vamoose—*mafeesh!* In other words, depart."

The Egyptian bowed his head as a sign that he understood. At the door he turned.

"You still doubt my word?" he cried. "Even though you heard the voice of the great High Priest of Anubis issue from his coffin——"

"Oh, *that?"* Wilmer laughed contemptuously. "I'll allow that gave me a jolt for a moment or two, though I've heard as good ventriloquism at a kids' tea-party. It wasn't a bad performance—for an amateur. But you really ought to go and see one of the star turns at the music-halls. You'd learn a trick or two——"

"Enough!" broke in Kareef angrily. "I've tried to warn you—tried to save you——"

"At a price which I don't fancy paying," Wilmer interrupted in his turn. Then, pointedly, "I'm not keeping you up, am I, by any chance?" He deliberately removed his coat and vest and hung them up. "I am now about to retire to bed. In order to avoid any regrettable misunderstanding, I may mention that it is my habit to sleep with a hair-trigger automatic under my pillow. I'm reckoned a fair shot," he added significantly.

The Egyptian made a deep obeisance.

"It is well," he growled in a tone which belied his words. "Farewell, rash unbeliever, I leave you . . . to your fate!"

Wilmer Denton watched him pass down the stairs, then carefully bolted the door behind him.

"I guess I'll have a new lock put on that front door," he murmured just before he fell asleep.

11. Delorme Makes a Proposition

EDWIN LORIMER was seated at his desk in the room of Mounthead Chase which he used for his secretarial duties, when the door was flung open without ceremony and Lady Thelma entered the room. A single glance told him that the impending interview was likely to be a stormy one. The girl's dark eyes were blazing; her beautiful features were contorted with an expression of mingled fear and fury.

Closing the door behind her, she advanced toward him.

"A pretty plotter you are!" she cried in a tone of withering sarcasm. "What a wonderful plan you thought of for getting rid of Wilmer Denton! How subtle of you to think of employing a broken-down character actor to impersonate him—and then to pick on my own husband for the job!"

The man lifted his narrow shoulders in a shrug and rose to his feet.

"I swear I did not know who he was when I engaged him for the work," he protested.

Thelma stamped her foot angrily.

"Why, his very name should have told you that!" she sneered.

"I never thought of asking the fellow his name—and even if I had, he would most likely have given an assumed one. He was a complete stranger to me. I would never have dreamt of choosing him if I thought he had a hold over you. A minute's calm thought ought to convince you that I acted in perfect good faith toward you, Thelma. What had I to gain in sharing my secret with him?"

"Well, you *have* shared it, and he has not been slow to take advantage of his knowledge." She drew an open letter from her pocket and tossed it on the desk before him. "I received that letter from him this morning."

"If he is demanding money for his silence, and has put his demands into black and white, you can have him arrested——"

"And ruin myself socially and financially when the facts come to light!" she cried impatiently. "I came to you to help me out of the trap your own cleverness has led me into, but it seems I have come to a fool for advice. Read the letter."

My dearest wife, Thelma,

Words cannot describe my joy when a kind providence decreed that once again our paths in life should cross. Little did I dream when I accepted the offer for that special one-night engagement (no need to specify the character I represented) that I should find myself playing opposite to my own wife! Truly has it been said that real life is far more dramatic than any stage play. The situation, when I realized the identity of the lady to whom I was making love, proved that there was one dramatic theme new to the experience of even such a practised old stager as I.

I felt—and I am sure you will agree with me—that a very good little one-act drama could be written round that situation. It would be, of course, but a variation of the old, old triangle—the beautiful bigamist, the millionaire husband, who is not her husband, and the penniless hero (or villain, as the case may be) who is.

I have, in fact, written such a play, and you will no doubt be delighted to hear that I intend giving you the first option of acquiring same. The price is £5,000 cash down, for which sum I agree to make over all rights to you. If, however, you should fail to take advantage of this offer within the space of one week from the date of this letter, I shall deem myself free to offer the play elsewhere.

Perhaps Lord Mounthead would find it interesting reading?

Your affectionate husband,
CLAUDE DELORME.

He read the letter through slowly, then folded it and handed it back.

"SKILFULLY veiled blackmail, but blackmail none the less," was his comment. He stood for a while in thought, trying to gage this new and unexpected aspect of the case. "It is very evident that we have to deal with a very clever man in your late—or perhaps it would be more correct to say your present—husband. Notice how artfully he covers his demands for money with an offer to sell some trumpery play. Even if he were charged with blackmail, a skilful counsel might be able to convince the jury that it was a bona-fide offer; the fact that both you and he were formerly in the theatrical profession would be a strong point in his favor. Of course, we might lay a trap for him——"

"And proclaim myself to the world as the wife of a blackmailing waster!" she cried scornfully. "I came to you in the hope that you might be able to suggest some way out."

Lorimer produced his case and coolly lit a cigarette.

"The only way out, my dear Lady Thelma," he said, between lazy puffs of smoke, "is to pay him what he asks."

A laugh that was almost a snarl fell from her crimson lips.

"You fool! Do you think I would be here asking your help if I had the money to buy him off? The whole trouble is that I can't put my fingers on five thousand shillings—let alone as many pounds! My allowance is already overdrawn — my credit strained to the breaking-point."

He nodded slowly.

"And Lord Mounthead is scarcely the type of man to hand over that sum without question," he said musingly. He blew a smoke ring and watched it float upward; then added softly, "Of course, there is the Golden Mummy."

She did not pretend to misunderstand his meaning.

"Could you turn the jewels into ready cash—in a week?" she asked bluntly.

He shook his head.

"Nor in a year!" he laughed. "Not being a professional jewel thief, I do not happen to have the addresses of every 'fence' in London at my finger-tips! No, what I was thinking of was to conclude a little deal with this Egyptian fellow—Kareef. He seems so desperately anxious to get hold of that piece of departed humanity called the Golden Mummy that he might be willing to pay a handsome sum for a little inside assistance."

She made an impatient movement.

"Impossible—there would be no time to get into touch with him, for one thing. We must have money nearer to hand than that." She paused, and her eyes lit up with returning hope. She came a step nearer to the man and clutched his arm. "Fool that I was not to have thought of it before," she whispered. *"The safe!"*

He was looking at her with a surprize that was obviously genuine.

"Safe?" he repeated with a smile of contempt. "You mean that trumpery affair in the study? Why, my dear girl, there's never more than fifty pounds, at the most, kept in there."

"No, no, *that* safe is merely a blind," she whispered eagerly. "There is another—a much larger one—concealed behind a secret door in the bookcase. It contains piles of banknotes done up in packets—bearer-bonds, securities, gold! If I could get hold of a single packet, my troubles would be at an end."

"Indeed?" He was looking at her with eyes that were veiled in thought as he slowly uttered the word. "I thought I had found out all there was to find out in this house, but it seems that I have something yet to learn. If what you say is correct, it certainly looks as if that safe is your only hope. I suppose the old boy carries the key about with him?"

She shook her head quickly.

"There is no key. It is a combination lock."

"And the combination is——?" He paused expectantly, his eyes afire with eagerness.

"It is one which I should not have been able to remember, even if he had told it to me," she returned with a frown of disappointment. "The symbols on the combination are tiny Egyptian hieroglyphics, and the key is a passage from the ancient *Book of the Dead,* or some dead and forgotten work. There are fifteen signs on the lock, and John explained to me that the chances were a billion to one against its being opened by someone who did not know the right form of words to use."

"By the way," Lorimer asked, struck by a sudden thought, "why does Lord Mounthead keep such a huge sum of cur-

rency in his own charge? I should have thought he would have lodged it in a bank."

"Such a course is expressly forbidden by the terms of the will by which his brother bequeathed the money to Celia."

He gave a start, and a smile touched his thin lips.

"So, all that wealth belongs to your beautiful stepdaughter?" he said thoughtfully. "This is clearly a situation which calls for a little strategy."

And he spent the greater part of the next hour in explaining with great detail the precise form which that "strategy" should take. Lorimer brought all the resources of his keen, unscrupulous wits to his task; well enough he knew that if Claude Delorme disclosed to Lord Mounthead his true relationship to Thelma, he would not hesitate in exposing the trick by which Wilmer Denton had been disgraced, in which case he himself might say good-bye to his hopes of acquiring Celia's immense patrimony.

At all costs Claude Delorme's silence must be ensured. If sufficient money was not available within a week, other means would have to be employed.

"I will send your dear Claude an invitation to the fancy dress ball you are giving here on Friday night," he said in conclusion. "Providing he comes in disguise, no one will be aware of his presence. If we have the money we can hand it to him then. If not"—he shrugged slowly and his eyes narrowed to glittering slits, as he said very softly—"we must use another form of . . . persuasion!"

The exciting chapters in next month's WEIRD TALES will tell more about the adventure of the Golden Mummy that stalked horrifyingly through the night. Reserve your copy at your news dealer's now

Song of Autumn

By C. P. BAUDELAIRE*

I

Soon shall the night enfold us like a frozen pall. . . .
  The summer sinks from us, too radiant and short:
Even now, with harsh funereal shock, I hear the fall
  Of fagots that resound upon the paven court.

All the long winter comes to invade my being: choler,
  Tremblings of hate and horror, labor forced and rude;
And, like the sun in his pale hell of shadows polar,
  My heart will be no more than crimson ice and blood.

I hear with frightful tremors every block that falls;
  A builded scaffold echoes not more leadenly.
My soul is like a lonely tower whose ruinous walls
  Go down to a battering-ram wielded unweariably.

It seems to me, half lulled as by monotonous blows,
  That, nailed somewhere in sullen haste, a coffin rings. . . .
For whom?—'Twas yesterday the summer; summer goes:
  This sound is like the rumor of all departing things.

II

I love the light of your great eyes of green and amber!
  But all the day is only bitterness to me,
And from your love I turn, and from the firelit chamber,
  To watch the sun that shines far off upon the sea.

Yet, love me still, and be as a mother, mild and tender,
  For one who does you wrong, for this ungrateful one;
Sweetheart or sister, be the soft, ephemeral splendor
  Of the full-risen autumn or the setting sun.

Brief task! the tomb awaits, yawning and ravenous.
  My brow upon your knees, in half-regretful dreams
I would relume the hot white summer flown from us,
  And taste this aftermath of mild and yellow beams.

* Translated by Clark Ashton Smith from the French.

In a Graveyard

By EANDO BINDER

A ghastly doom sought out an author who tried to capture a weird atmosphere by writing his story in a cemetery

FEELING a bit foolish, Kent Dawson opened his portable case, set the lid down on the thick sward, and placed the typewriter on a low, flat tombstone, squarely over its epitaph. This was the oldest section of the dilapidated Rosedale Cemetery, its many graves marked with every conceivable type of gravestone. For a moment it seemed almost sacrilegious to invade this solemn place, gloomy with the long shadows of approaching sunset. Yet it was the ideal spot, deserted and quiet, rife with the feeling of death and eternal peace.

He next unfolded his campstool, and adjusted it in a position for typing. Then he extracted his writing-paper from a big brown envelope, and from his coat pocket he took a package of cigarettes. Now he was ready.

Kent Dawson sat down and began his work. It progressed rapidly, for the plot had all been worked out previously, and the characters were quite clear in his mind. Of course, it was the "atmosphere" of the place that he needed: an "atmosphere" of death and other-worldly resurrection, for he was writing a tale of the supernatural. This story of the Undead, of vampires—he had tried to write it in his stuffy room at home, without success. A friend of his had suggested, in a joking way, that he write it in a cemetery. Kent had taken the suggestion literally.

Now, with the very breath of the grave in his nostrils, he found it absurdly easy to achieve his all-important "atmosphere." The long, creeping shadows, the ghostly outlines of the tombstones, the plaintive note of the whippoorwill, the subtle essence of charnel death—they all found their way into the story.

He kept his keys going at a furious rate. Now and then, at a break in the steady flow of his thoughts, he would glance up and let his eyes wander around. As the light of day died, the white marble pieces about him stood out sharply in the gathering gloom. The tall sad Christ at his right, rising above dwarf evergreens, shone with the last rays of a setting sun.

When the light grew too dim for him to see the sentences as he wrote them out, Kent Dawson fumbled in his topcoat, which he had thrown on the grass at his feet, and drew a flashlight from the pocket. He had come determined to finish his work; for a story to Kent Dawson was like a gnawing worm, giving him no peace until he had extracted it from his mind in its completeness.

He snapped on the flashlight and set it in a niche between two angels in the headpiece at the end of the large flat tombstone. After a bit of adjusting he had arranged both typewriter and torch so that the white cone of light centered on the words as he wrote them out.

Now it had become quite dark and he went on, absorbing the "atmosphere" of the scene through his feelings rather than through his senses. The white granite and alabaster of the scattered gravemarkers assumed all sorts of macabre

shapes in his dim vision. In his mind's eye he pictured himself surrounded by a troop of spirits and creatures of the night.

KENT started and broke off in the middle of a sentence as the beam of light suddenly swung away. He lunged forward just in time to catch the flashlight as it tumbled from its perch. He tried to set it again in the niche formed by two angelic elbows, but it refused to stay in place.

He thought for a minute on the problem. Then he stooped for a bunch of grass, formed a little tee with it at his side on the flat stone, and rested the flashlight on this with its lens tilted upward. The light sprayed partly over the inscription, revealing a portion of the chiseled wording, and centered blindly on the paper before his eyes. He went on.

"The Vampire's fiery eyes, coal-hot in a dead white face, bored through the bushes——"

At this moment Kent Dawson felt his first tremor of real fear, in all the imaginings he had gone through feeling the synthetic fears of his terrorized characters. For as he wrote those words of fiery eyes peering from concealment, *he saw those eyes!* They were two glowing orbs, exactly like those he visioned for the story, staring at him from a thicket of bushes which encircled the nearest grave.

Kent sat for a frozen instant, then leaped from his stool, swinging the flashlight beam into the bushes. Nothing was there, nothing—just the transparent tangle of small-leaved branches. Kent mopped a perspiring brow, told himself he was a fool, and replaced the flashlight. But his copy after that was full of typographical errors and cross-outs.

Was the eeriness of the place getting him? Was it now no longer an inspiration for his story, but a horrifying stimulus to his secret fears? What secret fears? Surely he, hard-headed writer of fantasy tales, could have no secret beliefs in things beyond the mundane. Or had his fictionings rooted themselves so deeply in his sensitive mind that he was beginning to believe in them?

Kent Dawson went on in a dogged way. It was some time later, when the distant hoot of an owl involuntarily set his blood tingling, that he came to the grand denouement of his story. He was about to have his hero oppose and vanquish the Vampire that threatened to unloose upon the countryside a horde of elementals in bodies stolen from graveyards.

"The very blood in his veins congealing, he roused himself with titanic effort of mind——"

As though animated, the flashlight rolled from its bed of grass, and Kent was forced to break away from the exciting passage to make a grab for it. He caught it as it rolled toward the edge of the tombstone, set it back in place after tamping the grass mound, and placed his fingers back on the keys.

"——flung his iron cross before his face, and plunged——"

Again the flashlight inexplicably rolled away. With a curse at the thing's unwitting perversity, Kent grabbed it and made a mound with new grass, molding it carefully with a hollow in its center. He went back to his keys.

"——straight for the mocking, leering visage of the Undead——"

In utter exasperation, as the electric torch again moved out of position, Kent Dawson flung the grass wide, and stood up both to ponder the matter and to stretch his cramped muscles. He lit a cigarette. It would not take long now to finish, for the hero was about to hurl in the Vampire's face the Holy Philtre,

destroying him as strong acid destroys a metal. It would not take long if only he could set that flashlight to stay. . . .

"PERHAPS I could help you?"

Kent Dawson whirled, dropping his cigarette, with a crawling sensation in his throat. The reflection of the flashlight, beating back from the headpiece toward which it was aimed, revealed a tall and shadowy figure. Kent's first frightened impulse was to grab up the light and train it on the figure, but he saw then, with a sense of relief, that the figure was that of a human being, rather shabbily dressed.

"You—you startled me!" said Kent tremulously. "I——"

"I beg your pardon," said the other. "I did not mean——"

" 'Sall right," Kent interrupted quickly, ashamed of his display of nerves. "You see, I had no idea there was anybody—here. I thought I was quite alone."

At the note of interrogation in his voice, the stranger raised a thin arm. "I shall explain, of course. I noticed you here quite some time before, and finally decided to approach. I did not realize you would be so startled."

Kent wondered if the eyes he had seen before had been those of this man, watching him in curiosity. After all, it came to him, the other man must have been just as surprized to find him—here in a cemetery. He looked the stranger over closely. In the poor light not much was revealed except that he was amazingly tall and thin, his face haggard and white.

"I might say," went on the stranger, "that it is a habit with me—to walk through this cemetery after dark. You see, it is dear to me. I mean that it holds for me certain memories. That particular tombstone, underneath it lies——"

Kent Dawson saw the stranger's finger pointing to the very tombstone on which his typewriter rested, and a sudden sense of guilt brought stammering apologies to the writer's lips.

"You must forgive me. Really, I didn't realize. I shall leave immediately." And Kent Dawson turned to begin putting his things away. Writing a story over the grave of this poor man's mother, or wife perhaps!

"Do not leave," said the stranger in tones that were queerly flat. "I've noticed that your flashlight seems unwilling to stay in place. I will hold it for you so that you may finish your story."

"It is almost done," said Kent, hardly knowing what to make of the strange situation, "and I can do the rest tomorrow, at home. I have been able to get into the story the atmosphere this place inspires. The ending is purely mechanical. I can do that under the electrics with nothing more inspiring to look at than wall-paper."

The stranger suddenly stepped a pace closer. "If you will pardon my saying so, I think you are wrong about the ending being purely mechanical. It is your denouement that should have the full quality of . . . reality!"

Kent, with his hand on the typewriter roll, turned his head. What could this shabby man know of denouement?—of anything about stories?

"Look!" continued the stranger. "Around you is the home of the dead. But *are* they the dead? May they not have a life of their own? How can light-loving man know of the things that happen in the dark? Light is only half of life; twelve hours of every day are darkness! And it is in the cloak of darkness that the after-world has its being, a world of spirits that mankind knows little of, and at which he scoffs, although his innermost heart tells him it exists!"

The stranger's tones had been emphatic, yet not loud, as though the speaker were sure of his knowledge. Kent stared in surprize, with a suppressed desire to point the electric torch full upon this mysterious man.

"Sit down," said the stranger quietly, yet with a quality of imperiousness. "Sit down and write. Finish your story and remember that there lies around you the strange night-world of the Undead!"

KENT DAWSON sat down and put his hands to the keys. No doubt the man was half mad, walking after dark through cemeteries till he believed in ghosts. Perhaps the loss of the dear one who lay quiet beneath this tombstone had deranged his mind. And at that, the man was right—it would be better to finish the story here and now. As the stranger silently reached forth a hand, Kent handed him the flashlight with a mumbled thanks.

Then he went to work. It was so easy now; the words fell in a rich torrent of fluency, subtly saturated with the ultra-natural and macabre. His denouement would be a masterpiece in itself. Then, at a pause for thought, he noticed that the air had grown chilly. A cold wind that seemed to come from his back struck through his light summer coat. He turned for his topcoat, to find the stranger holding it forth to him.

"Oh, thank you," said Kent, slipping into it without rising. "Rather chilly, don't you think?"

There was no answer as Kent Dawson went on. The words flew from his mind, and transposed themselves to his fingers and the paper with uncanny rapidity. Kent began dimly to realize that he had here a marvelous tale, spawned, as it were, directly from the graveyard around him. It was a curious sensation, like being prodded—it was inspiration *par excellence!* He made a mental note to write all his stories thereafter in graveyards. . . .

Kent Dawson picked at the period key, set his typewriter for the last paragraph, and leaned back, lighting a cigarette. It was always his custom to do this—relax for a moment or two, smoke, and then dash off the final paragraph. He had a passion for turning out that last paragraph—on which sometimes the entire "tone" of a story could be made or destroyed—as a work of supreme art.

To relax quite completely, Kent turned his head partly to the stranger behind him, whose hand held the flashlight steadily, and asked: "By the way, as long as we've met, we may as well introduce ourselves. I'm Kent Dawson."

He sensed a nod of the other's head as he heard him say: "My name? Well, meaningless as names are . . . John Allen Kilarney."

"Pleased to know you," said Kent. "You can't imagine how grateful I am that you are holding the light for me. Perhaps, if the time is convenient, you may accompany me back to my rooms. Return favor, you know; we could break a bottle of vintage."

"Thank you, but I do not drink—wine," said the man whose name was John Allen Kilarney.

Kent thought he detected a sudden note of maliciousness in the other's voice. He might have inquired further, except that the last paragraph leaped into his mind with the astonishing clearness of a printed page. It was the perfect ending for this story of terror and witchery. Kent set it down with hands that trembled in eagerness. Then, having completed it, he thought over the story for a moment, exulting in its masterful quality. It had everything it needed to bring the acclaim

of the fantasy fiction public. Kent almost felt, having written of the sinister Vampire, that he could believe in his existence.

"Well, sir," said Kent, unrolling the last sheet from the machine and waving it, "this is the finale of a damned good story, if I do say so myself. The plot alone is unique and realistic, but the atmosphere—the setting, one might say—is superb, thanks to this place."

"You have written of a—Vampire?" asked the stranger in curiously muffled tones. "And you have made it convincing?"

"Convincing?" repeated Kent with a touch of boastfulness. "Why, it's almost as though I had come across one." He began putting his typewritten sheets together.

"You do not believe in—Vampires?"

"Well, do you?" countered Kent, extracting a paper clip from his vest and fastening the sheets together.

A sort of hoarse chuckle from behind him caused Kent Dawson to turn around. Then he choked and started back in fright, for the stranger's cadaverous face was not more than six inches away, revealing eyes that burned with a greedy lust. The hideous face gaped open to reveal fang-like teeth, and his stomach was revolted by a stench that somehow made him think of blood.

Kent Dawson stood with his back to the gravestone, rooted in a paralysis of fear. "Who—who are you?" he gasped.

Again that hoarse chuckle came from the other, and his eyes gleamed exactly as had those peering from the bushes before—exactly as those of the Vampire in the story!

"I am what you deny the existence of," said the tall stranger. "I am of this night-world around you: I am one of the Undead. I am a—*vampire!*"

KENT DAWSON screamed once and leaped erect to run away from this horror, but long thin arms of crushing power encircled him. He shrieked again, this time in utter terror, as he felt sharp teeth sink into his throat. Some instinct greater than the instinct of self-preservation lent him a sudden strength, and he almost broke free of the steel-strong arms, wrenching his throat away from the closing jaws. He felt the tearing of his own tender flesh and the spurt of warm blood.

Struggling maniacally, with his spine pressed against the sharp edge of the tombstone, Kent Dawson felt the creature's pitiless arms tighten. He heard an obscene licking of lips, and then felt them clamp slobberingly to his bleeding throat again.

The taste of fresh blood seemed to increase the monster's strength tenfold, and Kent Dawson knew he was lost. But he continued his useless struggles, tearing at the vampire's head with futile hands. As Kent's strength weakened with the outpouring of his life's blood, the creature bore him backward over the edge of the tombstone, twisting his head downward.

Kent Dawson made one last desperate effort to save himself, clawing at the gravestone for a grip to wrench himself away. His flailing hands caught at the typewriter and jerked it to the ground. The flashlight, which lay there so as to light the epitaph over which the machine had stood, revealed to the doomed man's eyes these words, chiseled out of the stone:

"Born 1882, Died Anno Domini 1924. Here Lie the Mortal Remains of John Allen Kilarney. May His Soul Rest in Peace."

The Amulet of Hell

By ROBERT LEONARD RUSSELL

What ghastly creature was he who called himself G. Kodopolis?

I HAD been walking in the drizzling rain for some time when I first came to the dingy little curio shop whose faded sign announced: "G. Kodopolis—Curios." It was on a narrow, dirty street in a part of town with which I was totally unfamiliar.

The hour was well toward midnight, but a light was burning in the shop and, although the place had a queerly alien aspect, I felt a sudden, inexplicable urge to enter it. So I pushed open the door and went in.

Once inside, I scarcely noticed the merchandise lining the grimy walls, for my eyes fell immediately upon the only other person in the place, and he was indeed singular enough to claim my whole attention. The man was tall, skeleton-thin in his strangely dark and baggy garments, and the portion of his face that showed above the tangled beard was like nothing more than yellowed parchment stretched over a skull. But his eyes drew me most; large, jet-black, they seemed to gaze into my innermost being, and from them emanated a peculiar force of their own.

I started to speak, but words would not come; I tried to move, but my muscles refused to obey my brain. I could only stare into those eyes and lose myself in their depths. A wave of blackness swept over me and I recall nothing else that happened until I stumbled out into the street some time later, clutching some small, hard object tightly in one hand.

I walked along dazedly for a time; then I found myself quite unexpectedly at the door of my apartment house. I climbed the stairs to my rooms, threw myself fully dressed across the bed, and immediately fell asleep.

IT WAS late next morning when I awoke with a listless feeling and a slight pain at my throat. I was stiff and cramped from sleeping in my clothes, and a small hard something was boring into the middle of my back. I rolled over, found the object, and held it up to the light.

It was an amulet, a rosary of black beads hung with an inverted crucifix bearing the form of an obscene satyr in place of the pendent Christ. It was evidently the thing I had carried from the curio shop, and it puzzled me quite as much as did the strange incidents of the past night.

I stayed in my room all that day, for a strange lethargy possessed me. It was accompanied by a peculiar depression of spirits that increased almost to melancholia as the day wore on and darkness approached. Several times I tried to lose myself in some book or other, but the printed pages had no appeal for me, and ever and anon something came in between my eyes and the words before me —it was the face of the old man in the curio shop, G. Kodopolis.

I went early to bed, but sleep evaded me. I tossed fitfully on my bed for hours before slumber at last claimed me. And slumber brought horrid dreams to plague me.

I was sitting on my bed in the black nothingness of interstellar space, and a hissing *thing* came to gnaw at my throat,

a thing with the face of G. Kodopolis, the shopkeeper. Then I plunged down into a black well that had no bottom, and the scene vanished, leaving only his eyes. So the dream ended.

I awoke next morning with the same feeling of apathy that I had experienced before. I called in Doctor McGee, an unimaginative, stolid individual, who examined me mechanically and gave his diagnosis.

"Looks like anemia, Mr. Trellan," he said when he had finished, "but I can't be certain as yet. Just rest for a few days and then we can tell more about it."

The doctor had hardly gone when Pietro Jachini, an Italian friend of mine from across the hall, came in to see me. He gave me one careful look and his eyes widened in horror.

"*Dio,* Jim," he gasped, "it is devil's work!"

He insisted on examining my neck. Then he brought a mirror and showed me what he had found: two tiny punctures in the skin over my jugular vein. With a shock, the dreams of the past night came back to me.

"Jim," Jachini began in what seemed rather ludicrous earnestness, "something has happened. What is it? You must tell me of anything out of the way that has happened to you recently. I want to help you, and God knows you'll need help."

So I told him of my queer experience in the little old shop in the fog. When I came to a description of G. Kodopolis, my friend's olive face blenched and he muttered something, ending with:

"It is even worse than I thought from your wan appearance and the marks on your throat. You have heard of vampires, have you not, Jim?"

"Of course, Pietro," I began, "but you surely don't think *he* is a vampire? Why, such things exist only in outworn superstitions, and——" I broke off at the look he gave me.

"No, not a vampire," Jachini said; "that is what I thought at first, but your description of him . . . tell me, Jim, did he *give* you anything?"

I nodded, found the amulet among the papers and books on my table and handed it to him. He gave the thing one look, crossed himself and dropped it back on the table.

Excusing himself hurriedly, Pietro rushed across the hall to his own room. I lay back, staring at the ceiling and wondering what it was all about. My meeting with Kodopolis, my hideous dreams, the punctures on my neck, Pietro's queer actions and his mention of the old superstition of vampires—what could it all mean?

In a few minutes Jachini was back, carrying a small, black-bound volume. Without a word, he sat down and began to turn through it. I caught a momentary glimpse of the title page: the name of the book was *Vampyrs.* At length Pietro found the section he had sought, and he began to read the queer sentences aloud.

"The *vrykolokas* of Greek superstition," he read in his rich, scarcely accented voice, "is the undead body of some exceedingly vicious mortal. It lives not, yet is not dead, existing on fresh blood of hapless men. Unlike the true vampire, it is not shut within a coffin by day, but is then listless and inactive, especially if it has fed the night previous. Not like other vampires, the *vrykolokas* eats of the bodies of its victims when all blood is exhausted.

"The creature is unaffected by sacred tokens, excepting the image of our Lord on His tree. The stake, the knife, and the silver bullet are alike useless against the

monster, as are all mortal weapons. Only fire may destroy a *vrykolokas*. Yet he binds himself to a victim by some link such as an amulet or a witch-mark, and the victim is freed if the link be in some manner broken."

I started at the mention of an amulet. Did all this have some hidden significance to me? I would have interrupted Jachini, but he motioned me to silence and read on:

"The *vrykolokas* may be distinguished by its odd skin like old papyrus, its hypnotic eyes, by abnormal hair-growings upon its visage, and its emaciation. It is——"

Then I screamed. Jachini must have dropped the book and stared at me, but I was unaware of anything save that the description of the *vrykolokas* in the old book would have served equally well to describe G. Kodopolis. An icy trickle ran down my spine as the awful truth forced itself upon me—Kodopolis was a *vrykolokas* and I was his victim.

"So you see it, too, Jim," said Jachini understandingly.

"Yes, yes," I gasped, "I see it all now. Pietro, the amulet, *destroy it*—it must be the link, and the book says——"

Jachini picked up the blasphemous rosary, crossed to the fireplace, and tossed the thing into the midst of the glowing embers. It landed upright, stuck, and the little flames licked around it. Yet it remained unblemished by the radiance, and slowly the fire began to recede until the dread token was left on a tiny heap of dead coals in the center of the fire. Jachini shrugged, then dragged the thing from the fire onto the hearthstone.

"I feared as much," he said, "but there is yet another way. I shall weight the thing with a stone and drop it off the Park Street bridge—once in the river it will be gone for ever."

He took the thing and left. In a little while he came back to tell me that it was done. So, with that hellish trinket gone, I felt certain that my troubles were over. I spent the rest of the day in greater peace of mind, and went to bed directly after dinner, to fall asleep almost at once.

I slept soundly for an hour or so, when I was awakened by a knock at my door. I answered it, to find a messenger boy with a parcel for me. I took it, tossed it on the table unopened, and went back to sleep.

I SLEPT this time until the sun, streaming in my window next morning, woke me, but my sleep was haunted by dreams in which old Kodopolis crept again into my room to sink his fangs into my throat.

When I got up next day, I opened the package that had been delivered to me. A hand of ice gripped my spine as I saw what it contained. In the box was the hideous little amulet that Pietro Jachini had thrown into the river and, in that moment, I knew that my dreadful dreams of the night just past were no dreams at all but hideous reality.

I passed the whole of that day in a horror of anticipation, for I knew that with the coming of night, the monster that called itself Kodopolis would again visit me.

Doctor McGee called again during the day. If he but knew the true cause of my ailment it might shock him out of his stolid composure. But he would only think me a madman if I should tell him the truth.

Jachini spent much of the time with me. He sat by my bed while I told him of the return of the amulet and of my *dreams*. He insisted on remaining with me that night, but I refused, for a plan was taking form in my mind; yet if it

(Please turn to page 516)

COMING NEXT MONTH

OVER a bench bent a figure that was like something seen in a fanciful illustration of hell: a tall, gaunt figure draped from head to heels in a red robe, with red gloves shielding the hands, and a red mask over the face. Even over the head of the figure, red had been draped: a skull-cap, from which protruded two Luciferian horns in imitation of the horns of the Devil.

Next to this eery figure was the body of a legless man—gigantic torso supported by calloused, powerful hands.

"Girse," said the imperious, red-draped figure, without turning its head.

"Yes, Doctor Satan."

"You got into the Union Airlines hangar?"

"I did," said Girse, his pale eyes glinting.

"You attached the storage cube?"

"I did, with the wire leading to the propeller, and with fins attached to the propeller blades."

Unholy satisfaction glittered in the coal-black eyes. Then it was dimmed, and the light of rage glowed there.

"It will be as we wish it—unless Keane discovers it in time."

"Keane—is here?" quavered Girse.

"He is here," grated Doctor Satan. "I gleaned that from the mind of Corey. He is here, in Detroit. And he is daring to match his wits against mine once more."

Icy murder flared in the coal-black eyes. The red-gloved hands closed slowly, quiveringly.

"This time, Ascott Keane dies! This time I will get rid of the one obstacle between me and unlimited power, through fear, over the minds of men."

He turned back to the bench, with his red-gloved fingers delicately adjusting tiny, fine plates of some substance like mica which packed the interior of the small metal container on which he was working.

"With Keane out of the way," he rasped, "I could be supreme on earth—and I will be!" . . .

You cannot afford to miss this utterly amazing tale of the exploits of the world's weirdest criminal, who calls himself Doctor Satan, and his eery encounter with Ascott Keane, the world's strangest criminologist. It will be printed complete in next month's WEIRD TALES:

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November Weird Tales . . . Out November 1

The Amulet of Hell

(Continued from page 514)

failed I feared that I might draw my friend, too, into the toils of the monster, Kodopolis. So as night drew on he reluctantly took his leave and I was left alone.

I lay on my bed in the darkness for a long time. I felt that the end was not far off, for I could not stand many more visits by the *vrykolokas,* and if my plan failed all my blood would soon be gone and the thing would come again—to *eat.*

I looked toward a window at the far end of the room. There, lit by the glow of near-by street lamps, was a face I knew only too well. That yellow, bearded skull and those evil eyes could belong to no other than the monstrous G. Kodopolis himself.

A sort of hypnosis began to creep over me, my eyelids drooped, my tense muscles relaxed. I had no will to struggle, though I felt the weight of the *vrykolokas* on my chest, felt his sharp teeth at my throat. Then, as the very blood of life commenced to drain from my body, I lapsed into complete unconsciousness. . . .

Slowly I fought my way back to sensibility. The monster had feasted and fled again into the darkness; yet I could still feel the terrible power of him about me. I knew I must act at once, for I was so weak that Kodopolis' next visitation must certainly be his last, and I could visualize those rending fangs and talons at work. . . .

I pushed back the covers and got to my feet. I was weak and giddy, but I knew what I must do. I dressed in a few minutes, slipped downstairs into the dark street, and began to walk. The influence of Kodopolis drew me to his lair as a magnet draws steel; yet I can not to this day retrace my steps to the street where I came at last to the ancient shop.

The door was unlocked, and I pushed my way into the dusty old place. I went straight back to the curtains that shut off the rear of the shop, and through them into the room beyond.

On a long couch in the center of the room lay the *vrykolokas* himself, his evil yellow face passive, his dark eyes mercifully closed.

I withdrew quickly from the monster's chamber, my mind all alert now. I must hasten to my task before the creature sensed something amiss. The old book Jachini had read to me had said: *"Only fire may totally destroy a vrykolokas."* And Kodopolis' shop was a veritable tinder-box. A match dropped in one of the stacks of old books that littered the place would start a blaze that would soon spread to the dry, ancient wood of the walls. The result would be a holocaust.

I swept a stack of the old volumes to the floor and touched a match to their crumbling pages. The flames licked over them hungrily, and I fed the blaze with more books, then with wooden sections from the shelves. The fire spread rapidly.

So intent was I upon my work that I all but missed the slight sound as the curtains behind me parted. But I heard in time and turned to see G. Kodopolis standing in the entrance to the back room. He stared dazedly at the fire; then his dark eyes blazed with ferocity as he saw me. With an animal snarl he leaped forward.

The flames were roaring up the walls now, painting the whole grim scene a hellish red. Desperately I seized a burning brand from the fire and hurled it into the monster's leering face. Fire licked at his flowing beard, caught in his dark garments. He shrieked once, horribly, and toppled back into the fire.

As Kodopolis disappeared in the roaring inferno, I jerked open the door, threw

myself out into the darkness, and ran. I ran until I was near exhaustion; then I fell. My head met something hard and I became unconscious.

I came to in a hospital bed, my head bandaged and strangely light. I called a nurse and questioned her. She told me that I had been found lying unconscious in the street early that morning and I had been brought to the hospital with a deep head-wound and a slight concussion.

I was allowed no visitors that day, but the next afternoon Pietro Jachini came to see me. I told him the conclusion of the affair and he sat quiet through my recital, nodding a bit now and then at some incident.

When Pietro returned, the following day, he brought some newspapers, including every issue of the past few days. We looked through each of them with utmost care, but there was no mention of the fire in the curio shop. Yet the conflagration was so fierce that no power on earth, or even those of hell that were at Kodopolis' command, could have saved the old shop from complete destruction.

So the tale ends, but sometimes, even now, I dream and doubt for a time that G. Kodopolis' horrid undead existence is at an end. Still, the creature must have been destroyed in the fire; for though I still have his hellish amulet, the link between us, he has never again come to me.

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The Lost Club

By ARTHUR MACHEN

ONE hot afternoon in August a gorgeous young gentleman, one would say the last of his race in London, set out from the Circus end, and proceeded to stroll along the lonely expanse of Piccadilly Deserta. True to the traditions of his race, faithful even in the wilderness, he had not bated one jot or tittle of the regulation equipage; a glorious red and yellow blossom in his exquisitely cut frock coat proclaimed him a true son of the carnation; hat and boots and chin were all polished to the highest pitch; though there had not been rain for many weeks his trouser-ends were duly turned up, and the poise of the gold-headed cane was in itself a liberal education. But ah! the heavy changes since June, when the leaves glanced green in the sunlit air, and the club windows were filled, and the hansoms flashed in long processions through the streets, and girls smiled from every carriage. The young man sighed; he thought of the quiet little evenings at the Phœnix, of encounters on the Row, of the drive to Hurlingham, and many pleasant dinners in joyous company. Then he glanced up and saw a bus, half empty, slowly lumbering along the middle of the street, and in front of the "White Horse Cellars" a four-wheeler had stopped still (the driver was asleep on his seat), and in the "Badminton" the blinds were down. He half expected to see the Briar Rose trailing gracefully over the Hotel Cosmopole; certainly the Beauty, if such a thing were left in Piccadilly, was fast asleep.

Absorbed in these mournful reflections the hapless Johnny strolled on without observing that an exact duplicate of himself was advancing on the same pavement from the opposite direction; save that the inevitable carnation was salmon color, and the cane a silver-headed one, instruments of great magnifying power would have been required to discriminate between them. The two met; each raised his eyes simultaneously at the strange sight of a well-dressed man, and each adjured the same old-world deity.

"By Jove! old man, what the deuce are you doing here?"

The gentleman who had advanced from the direction of Hyde Park Corner was the first to answer.

"Well, to tell the truth, Austin, I am detained in town on—ah—legal business. But how is it you are not in Scotland?"

"Well, it's curious; but the fact is, I have legal business in town also."

"You don't say so? Great nuisance, ain't it? But these things must be seen to, or a fellow finds himself in no end of a mess, don't you know?"

"He does, by Jove! That's what I thought."

Mr. Austin relapsed into silence for a few moments.

"And where are you off to, Phillipps?"

The conversation had passed with the utmost gravity on both sides; at the joint mention of legal business, it was true, a slight twinkle had passed across their eyes, but the ordinary observer would have said the weight of ages rested on those unruffled brows.

"I really couldn't say. I thought of having a quiet dinner at Azario's. The Badminton is closed, you know, for repairs or somethin', and I can't stand the Junior Wilton. Come along with me, and let's dine together."

"By Jove! I think I will. I thought of calling on my solicitor, but I daresay he can wait."

"Ah! I should think he could. We'll have some of that Italian wine—stuff in salad-oil flasks—you know what I mean."

THE pair solemnly wheeled round, and solemnly paced toward the Circus, meditating, doubtless, on many things. The dinner in the little restaurant pleased them with a grave pleasure, as did the Chianti, of which they drank a good deal too much; "quite a light wine, you know," said Phillipps, and Austin agreed with him, so they emptied a quart flask between them, and finished up with a couple of glasses apiece of Green Chartreuse. As they came out into

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the quiet street smoking vast cigars, the two slaves to duty and "legal business" felt a dreamy delight in all things, the street seemed full of fantasy in the dim light of the lamps, and a single star shining in the clear sky above seemed to Austin exactly the same color as Green Chartreuse. Phillipps agreed with him. "You know, old fellow," he said, "there are times when a fellow feels all sorts of strange things—you know, the sort of things they put in magazines, don't you know, and novels. By Jove, Austin, old man, I feel as if I could write a novel myself."

The pair wandered aimlessly on, not quite knowing where they were going, turning from one street to another, and discoursing in a maudlin strain. A great cloud had been slowly moving up from the south, darkening the sky, and suddenly it began to rain, at first slowly with great heavy drops, and then faster and faster in a pitiless, hissing shower; the gutters flooded over, and the furious drops danced up from the stones. The two Johnnies walked on as fast as they could, whistling and calling "Hansom!" in vain; they were really getting very wet.

"Where the dickens are we?" said Phillipps. "Confound it all, I don't know. We ought to be in Oxford Street."

They walked on a little farther, when suddenly, to their great joy, they found a dry archway, leading into a dark passage or courtyard. They took shelter silently, too thankful and too wet to say anything. Austin looked at his hat; it was a wreck; and Phillipps shook himself feebly, like a tired terrier.

"What a beastly nuisance this is," he muttered. "I only wish I could see a hansom."

Austin looked into the street; the rain was still falling in torrents; he looked up the passage, and noticed for the first time that it led to a great house, which towered grimly against the sky. It seemed all dark and gloomy, except that from some chink in a shutter a light shone out. He pointed it out to Phillipps, who stared vacantly about him, then exclaimed:

"Hang it! I know where we are now. At least, I don't exactly know, you know, but I once came by here with Wylliams, and he told me there was some club or somethin' down this passage; I don't recollect exactly what he said. Hullo! Why, there goes Wylliams. I say, Wylliams, tell us where we are!"

A gentleman had brushed past them in the darkness and was walking fast down the passage. He heard his name and turned round, looking rather annoyed.

"Well, Phillipps, what do you want? Good evening, Austin; you seem rather wet, both of you."

"I should think we were wet; got caught in the rain. Didn't you tell me once there was some club down here? I wish you'd take us in, if you're a member."

Mr. Wylliams looked stedfastly at the two forlorn young men for a moment, hesitated, and said:

"Well, gentlemen, you may come with me if you like. But I must impose a condition; that you both give me your word of honor never to mention the club, or anything that you see while you are in it, to any individual whatsoever."

"Certainly not," replied Austin; "of course we shouldn't dream of doing so, should we, Phillipps?"

"No, no; go ahead, Wylliams, we'll keep it dark enough."

THE party moved slowly down the passage till they came to the house. It was very large and very old; it looked as though it might have been an embassy of the last century. Wylliams whistled,

knocked twice at the door, and whistled again, and it was opened by a man in black.

"Friends of yours, Mr. Wylliams?"

Wylliams nodded and they passed on.

"Now mind," he whispered, as they paused at a door, "you are not to recognize anybody, and nobody will recognize you."

The two friends nodded, and the door was opened, and they entered a vast room, brilliantly lighted with electric lamps. Men were standing in knots, walking up and down, and smoking at little tables; it was just like any club smoking-room. Conversation was going on, but in a low murmur, and every now and then someone would stop talking, and look anxiously at a door at the other end of the room, and then turn round again. It was evident that they were waiting for someone or somebody.

Austin and Phillipps were sitting on a sofa, lost in amazement; nearly every face was familiar to them. The flower of the Row was in that strange clubroom: several young noblemen, a young fellow who had just come into an enormous fortune, three or four fashionable artists and literary men, an eminent actor, and a well-known canon. What could it mean? They were all supposed to be scattered far and wide over the habitable globe, and yet here they were. Suddenly there came a loud knock at the door; and every man started, and those who were sitting got up. A servant appeared.

"The president is awaiting you, gentlemen," he said, and vanished.

One by one the members filed out, and Wylliams and the two guests brought up the rear. They found themselves in a room still larger than the first, but almost quite dark. The president sat at a long table and before him burned two candles, which barely lighted up his face.

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It was the famous Duke of Dartington, the largest landowner in England. As soon as the members had entered he said in a cold hard voice, "Gentlemen, you know our rules; the book is prepared. Whoever opens it at the black page is at the disposal of the committee and myself. We had better begin."

Someone began to read out the names in a low distinct voice, pausing after each name, and the member called came up to the table and opened at random the pages of a big folio volume that lay between the two candles. The gloomy light made it difficult to distinguish features, but Phillipps heard a groan beside him, and recognized an old friend. His face was working fearfully, the man was evidently in an agony of terror. One by one the members opened the book; as each man did so he passed out by another door.

At last there was only one left; it was Phillipps' friend. There was foam upon his lips as he passed up to the table, and his hand shook as he opened the leaves. Wylliams had passed out after whispering to the president, and had returned to his friends' side. He could hardly hold them back as the unfortunate man groaned in agony and leant against the table; he had opened the book at the black page. "Kindly come with me, Mr. D'Aubigny," said the president, and they passed out together.

"We can go now," said Wylliams. "I think the rain has gone off. Remember your promise, gentlemen. You have been at a meeting of the Lost Club. You will never see that young man again. Good night."

"It isn't *murder,* is it?" gasped Austin.

"Oh no, not at all. Mr. D'Aubigny will, I hope, live for many years; he has disappeared, merely disappeared. Good night; there's a hansom that will do for you."

THE two friends went to their homes in dead silence. They did not meet again for three weeks, and each thought the other looked ill and shaken. They walked drearily, with grave, averted face, down Piccadilly, each afraid to begin the recollection of the terrible club. Of a sudden Phillipps stopped as if he had been shot.

"Look there, Austin," he muttered, "look at that."

The posters of the evening papers were spread out beside the pavement, and on one of them Austin saw in large blue letters, "Mysterious disappearance of a gentleman." Austin bought a copy and turned over the leaves with shaking fingers till he found the brief paragraph—

Mr. St. John D'Aubigny, of Stoke D'Aubigny, in Sussex, has disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Mr. D'Aubigny was staying at Strathdoon, in Scotland, and came up to London, as is stated, on business, on August 16th. It has been ascertained that he arrived safely at King's Cross, and drove to Piccadilly Circus, where he got out. It is said that he was last seen at the corner of Glass House Street, leading from Regent into Soho. Since the above date the unfortunate gentleman, who was much liked in London society, has not been heard of. Mr. D'Aubigny was to have been married in September. The police are extremely reticent.

"Good God! Austin, this is dreadful. You remember the date. Poor fellow, poor fellow!"

"Phillipps, I think I shall go home, I feel sick."

D'AUBIGNY was never heard of again. But the strangest part of the story remains to be told. The two friends called upon Wylliams, and charged him with being a member of the Lost Club, and an accomplice in the fate of D'Aubigny. The placid Mr. Wylliams at first stared at the two pale, earnest faces, and finally roared with laughter.

"My dear fellows, what on earth are you talking about? I never heard such a cock-and-bull story in my life. As you say, Phillipps, I once pointed out to you a house said to be a club, as we were walking through Soho; but that was a low gambling club, frequented by German waiters. I am afraid that Azario's Chianti was rather too strong for you. However, I will try to convince you of your mistake."

Wylliams forthwith summoned his man, who swore that he and his master were in Cairo during the whole of August, and offered to produce the hotel bills. Phillipps shook his head, and they went away.

Their next step was to try and find the archway where they had taken shelter, and after a good deal of trouble they succeeded. They knocked at the door of the gloomy house, whistling as Wylliams had done. They were admitted by a respectable mechanic in a white apron, who was evidently astonished at the whistle; in fact he was inclined to suspect the influence of a "drop too much." The place was a billiard table factory, and had been so (as they learnt in the neighborhood) for many years. The rooms must once have been large and magnificent, but most of them had been divided into three or four separate workshops by wooden partitions.

Phillipps sighed; he could do no more for his lost friend; but both he and Austin remained unconvinced. In justice to Mr. Wylliams, it must be stated that Lord Henry Harcourt assured Phillipps that he had seen Wylliams in Cairo about the middle of August; he thought, but could not be sure, on the 16th; and also, that the recent disappearances of some well-known men about town are patient of explanations which would exclude the agency of the Lost Club.

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A NUMBER of our readers have commented on the fact that the characters that appear in stories again and again are more interesting than heroes (or villains) whose exploits hold the stage for one story only. The characters who stride through weird adventures in more than one story, or in a series of stories, are welcomed by the readers as old friends; just as, in a stock theater, each familiar actor is applauded when he appears upon the stage, for the audience recognizes an old friend whose work it has enjoyed in previous plays. So it is with story heroes and heroines—Jules de Grandin, the quick-tempered but lovable little French occultist and ghost-breaker; Solomon Kane, the dour Puritan fighting-man and redresser of wrongs; Conan, the barbarian adventurer and mighty man of valor, who fears neither the living nor the dead; Northwest Smith, the doughty hero who faces more weird terrors than all the rest; Jirel, the red-headed warrior maid with the indomitable heart—they all have carved a niche in your affections that is enlarged by each succeeding tale. But there is also another reason for the hold that these heroic characters have on the affections of you, the readers of WEIRD TALES: it is the hold that they have on the authors themselves. The characters run away with a tale; they refuse to confine themselves within the plot devised by the author; they assume roles not intended by him; often they start as mere minor actors in the story, but they grow in importance until the whole story revolves about them. They become as real and troublesome to their creators as if they were made of flesh and blood. And having gripped the interest of their authors, they are delineated with much more convincingness than would be the case if they were mere fictional creations that fitted themselves obligingly into the grooves the author placed them in, without causing their creators any trouble. And, once they become real to the authors, they become real to the readers too; and they step out from the printed page and grip the sympathies of the readers as they have gripped the authors. Naturally, their authors write other stories about these characters that have so seized their imaginations. Little did Seabury Quinn think, when he introduced a little French occultist into *The Horror on the Links* (published in WEIRD TALES for October, 1925), that the Frenchman would become the hero of more than fifty stories and the favorite fictional character of many thousands of readers. But he used the little Frenchman again, and yet again, until today the name and fame of Jules de Grandin are known and loved throughout the English-speaking world.

Conan stalked full-grown out of oblivion into Robert E. Howard's consciousness several years ago and so inspired him with his own ardor that he (Howard) was set to work, willy-nilly, recording the saga of Conan's adventures. Conan, that mighty man, is now known and admired throughout the world. You will be pleased to learn that Conan will soon appear in a serial novel in WEIRD TALES: *The Hour of the Dragon*, which is by all odds the weirdest and most fascinating story about Conan that Mr. Howard has yet written. And more stories of Northwest Smith and Jules de Grandin are in the printer's hands for early publication in this magazine.

In Amundsen's Tent

B. M. Reynolds, of North Adams, Massachusetts, writes: "Congratulations on your August WEIRD TALES. As usual it was exceptionally good. Many thanks for reprinting *In Amundsen's Tent*. I got just as big

a kick reading this horror classic over again, after seven and one-half years, as I did the first time. That tale is written with such vividness that one can almost feel the horror of an unknown doom, as it creeps unseen until the end, upon the three hapless explorers. And the story itself is basically plausible. Who can say that beings from interstellar space do not visit Earth? And who knows what strange paths of evolutionary development they may have traveled? This was the best story in the issue. John Martin Leahy's work was always pleasing to the readers. Couldn't you induce him to give us more of his work? He has been absent now for a number of years. You are to be commended for securing Frances Bragg Middleton. Her *Once in a Thousand Years* was a very unusual and wholly different sort of tale, well written and entertaining throughout. Welcome to WEIRD TALES, Miss Middleton, and may we hear from you often! Perhaps sometime you will devise a way for Shane O'Farrell to return to Atlantis. A sequel would be gratefully welcomed. Your third best was *The Treader of the Dust*, a bizarre little tale, written in Clark Ashton Smith's own inimitable style. In fact, all were pleasing, Doctor Satan, Jules de Grandin, Prince Torgeny, etc. However, I did miss Northwest Smith and Conan. Nominations for reprints: *Bimini, The Girl from Samarcand, The Space-Eaters* and *The Man With a Thousand Legs*. . . . I am patiently waiting for your next issue, as the forecast looks exceptionally good."

The August Stories

A. H. Hitchcock, of Cleveland, writes: "In your August number, *Doctor Satan* is good, *Satan in Exile* better, but *The Black Orchid* and *Once in a Thousand Years* are the best yet. *Shadows of Blood* and *The Avenger from Atlantis*, published in recent numbers, remain in my memory as exceptionally good."

Comments on Doctor Satan

Donald Allgeier writes from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: "Congratulations on a fine issue. I refer to the August WT. The new Doctor Satan series starts out to be very good, but the temptation to become tritely sensational with such material is sure to be strong. However, I have faith in Ernst and I believe he'll make it a real weird series.

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IF YOU WANT AN AFFECTIONATE sweetheart with money, write: Mary Lee, Box 445-W, Rolla, Missouri.

I'm glad to see de Grandin back, though his latest adventures are not so good as some. The best story is *Satan in Exile* — a truly great novel. *In Amundsen's Tent* disappointed me. Perhaps I expected too much after reading your readers' opinions of this story. Montgomery's tale is a charming and pathetic little number which I really enjoyed. It gets second place. Let's have Howard, Moore, and Cave again soon."

Once in a Thousand Years

Miss Catherine Moore, of Indianapolis, writes: "I read the new WT last night and was very much impressed with that story *Once in a Thousand Years*. Is the author a new one? I hope she'll write more. Also Doctor Satan seems very promising. Mrs. Brundage's cover was grand. That villainous twisted mouth!"

A Cover Suggestion

Fred E. Ebel, of Milwaukee, writes: "I see all is not quiet on the cover front. The fight goes on. Personally I am for the beautiful girls, even though they're not weird. Unless, of course, the poor girl has six arms. But let's devise some scheme to satisfy all. I suggest the usual girl cover, with perforations punched on the side (the cover, not the girl). Those who are shocked simply tear off the cover. And there, lo and behold, will be another cover, sedate and serene. As for the stories, I do not go for the poetic stuff. Naturally you can't satisfy all, and there may be some who don't like my choice: short stories. I read them first. They are meaty, and the surprize ending is usually very good. I like modern settings. I think that's the true test of a weird-story writer: to give an air of reality to a modern setting. We already associate the ancients with necromancy and magic. The writer has part of his task done. But modern settings, say a brokerage office, take plenty of technique for convincingness. . . . Jules de Grandin is still the outstanding detective."

Globe-trotting with WT

Clara Espiritu, of San Francisco, writes: "Since 1924 I have been reading your magazine and it has followed me all over the world. I have tramped the streets in Kobe frantic because I could not find a copy. I have bought it in Manila and in Cebu and in Hongkong and in Shanghai. After all these years of faithful devotion you have given me *detective stories!!* Now with all the various kinds of regular detective stories on the market, just why—yes—*why* do you have to drag one in by the ears to spoil your really wonderful magazine? Now just what in the name of Yog-Sogoth is weird about a corpse? It's just meat, as any cannibal will tell you. Cats are also not weird. A few more like that and you can change the name of your publication to 'Ghastly Detective Stories.' We readers like to have our hair raised and our spine chilled with tales like Jirel of Joiry in *The Black God's Kiss* — not have our stomachs retch with gore alone. Now *Doctor Satan* is not bad, but I am afraid he will open the door for that other kind whose title I cannot bring myself to mention. Now just one more kick and I will be meekly mute for another eleven years. *Satan in Exile* is a good story and would be in place in a science-fiction magazine; but is it weird? If so, where? Now if you continue to publish these stories about Jirel of Joiry and Northwest Smith and Conan the Cimmerian and Jules de Grandin I will continue to be faithfully at the news stand every month—otherwise I will resurrect my old stock of WEIRD TALES and live in memory of a good book gone wrong."

The Horror in the Museum

Bob Hoffman, of Muscatine, Iowa, writes: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES for quite some time, and the weirdest and the best, in my opinion, is Hazel Heald's *The Horror in the Museum*. Let's have more stories by this author. A truly appealing story was *They Called Him Ghost* by Laurence J. Cahill. Please keep your covers weird."

Reprint "The Wendigo"

Miss Lea Bodine Drake, of Fort Worth, Texas, writes: "This is just a note to suggest that for one of your weird story reprints you use *The Wendigo* by Algernon Blackwood. This is one of the most haunting and poetic ghost stories ever written. A 'sho'-nuff' weird tale. I read it as a child ten years ago, and it has stuck in my memory ever since. It is unforgettable, really. I am enclosing the coupon from the last issue to let you know the stories I liked best. I like Clark Ashton Smith, especially his poetry.

One of the best and most unusual tales I ever read was in your April number—*Out of the Eons* by Hazel Heald. It was great! Did she get her idea from Easter Island? They found an undecipherable script there, too, you know. I've seen pictures of it and it looks like nothing human! As for the Brundage-covers controversy — let them *all* be of lovely ladies. I *hate* pictures of doctors among their apparatus, and funny test-tubes, and so on. Makes the magazine look like a science monthly. Ugh! Another tip—did you ever consider having a department of weird information? About magic, and old legends, and religious spells, and so on? Or would that be unveiling the mysteries too much and sort of take the kick from too many stories? It's just an idea, anyway." [What do you other readers think about Miss Drake's suggestion?—THE EDITOR.]

Keep the Covers Weird

Julius Herme, of Tarkastad, South Africa, writes: "Hearty congrats on the improvement in your covers. It was about time that Mrs. Brundage should cease pandering to the nudists and indulge her art without offense to the susceptibilities of those who like the artistic without the nude. By all means keep the covers — and the stories — weird! But, as I said in a previous letter (which was not published), there is a difference between the weird and the sadistic. Please keep Howard and Smith going hard at it. They're (if a South African may indulge in an Americanism) the real goods! Hence my joining the hallelujah chorus and remaining an ardent reader."

Bloch, Lovecraft, Moore, et al.

I. S. Woodhead, of Titusville, Florida, writes: "I do not know how long I have been reading WT. My files include the issue of September, 1928, but that is only since we moved the last time. I can remember when your cover bore the script title you still carry on your title-page over the table of contents. I think I have been an avid reader for about ten years. At risk of being criticized as young Bloch was, should my own story be accepted, I am going to give my opinions on some of your stories. Bloch, by the bye, is a very entertaining author, although a polysyllabophile, so get him to do some more. My favorites are H. P. Love-

NEXT MONTH

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By Robert E. Howard

A THRILLING weird tale about Conan, barbarian adventurer, soldier of fortune, rugged individualist and all-around he-man—a tale of the strange guests who came to the sinister house of Aram Baksh—of a beautiful and scheming girl—and the venomous cobras that danced the dance of death.

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craft, C. L. Moore, David H. Keller, and Seabury Quinn, who is just as good without de Grandin, contrary opinions notwithstanding. In this connection I recall *The Cloth of Madness* and *The Phantom Farmhouse*, which I read as reprints. Frank Owen is in a class by himself, up with the old masters Poe and O'Brien. I am proud to be one of those who has read *The Wind That Tramps the World*, in 1929. . . . Stories of the future and giant-insect stories are *not* weird. Unless, I mean to say, they are weird. Doctor Keller's *The Solitary Hunters* was the best of the last type. Best of all I like stories of the Yog-Sothoth, Cthulhu, and Yig traditions. . . . You once printed a story (no longer in my files, which I wish were fuller) about Yig, whose title and author I have forgotten, but I suspect Lovecraft. I'd like to see it reprinted, if you know which one I mean." [The story to which you refer is *The Curse of Yig*, by Zealia Brown Reed, printed in WEIRD TALES for November, 1929. We have received a number of requests to reprint this story.—THE EDITOR.]

Likes and Dislikes

Miss Hildegarde Barthold, of Fort Wayne, Indiana, writes: "I am not an old reader of WEIRD TALES, having been a steady reader somewhat over a year, but I want to go on record as being decidedly 'agin' interplanetary stories, and weird-scientific, world-of-the-future stories. About one in a thousand has a real thrill in it, the exception being, of course, *Shambleau*. . . . I do not approve of printing detective tales as such in WEIRD TALES. If it is to continue to be the unique magazine, it must continue to be weird. I was very glad to see the reprint of *The Music of Erich Zann* when it appeared several months ago. Lovecraft in some of his tales such as *Through the Gates of the Silver Key* goes so far beyond human experience that it ceases to be weird. The really eery feeling comes when the weird and uncanny enters into everyday life, as in *Charon*. As to reprints, let's have some of those from WEIRD TALES that the older readers are constantly tantalizing us later ones by their references to; also let's have an occasional outside writer, either old or new. May I suggest that master of ghost stories, M. R. James? I'm afraid this letter seems to be a succession of complaints, but I'm continuing to buy WEIRD TALES each month."

Your Favorite Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of WEIRD TALES? Fill out the coupon on this page, or write a letter to the Eyrie in care of this magazine, and let us know what you like and what you dislike about the magazine. In the August issue, Frances Bragg Middleton's strange story of Atlantis, *Once in a Thousand Years*, has a commanding lead over all others, as determined by your votes and letters to the Eyrie.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE OCTOBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)---------- Why? ----------

(2)---------- ----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in WEIRD TALES if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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W. T.—8

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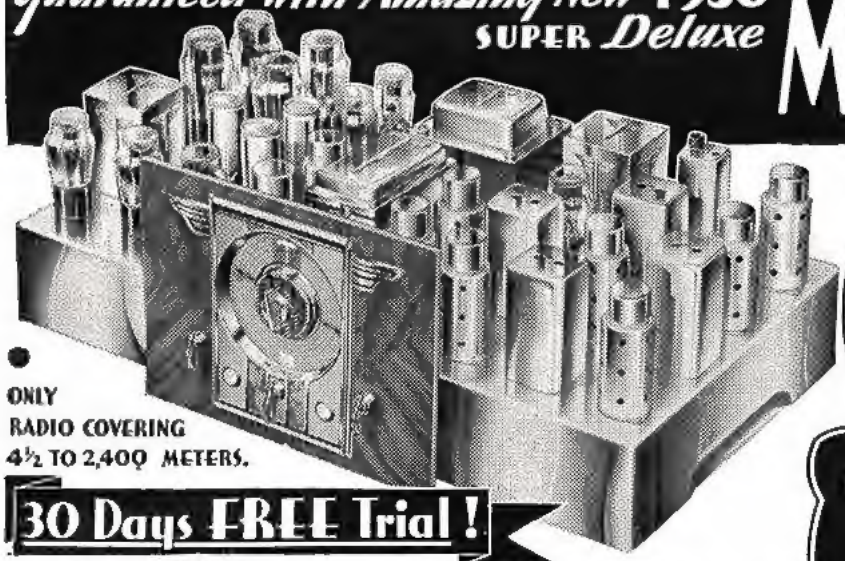

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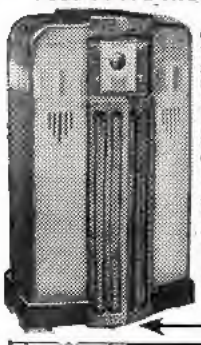

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